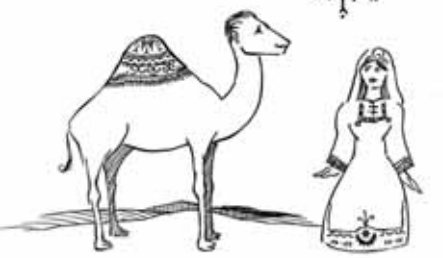
Timeless Tales

Folktales Told by Syrian refugees



SWEDISH ARTSCOUNCIL
SI. Swedish Institute.
FABULA STORYTELLING
AL BALAD

Timeless Tales

Folktales told by Syrian Refugees

Stories Edited by: **Zulaikha Abu Risha**

Translated by: **Serene Huleileh**

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The Hakawati project publications

Timeless Tales
Folktales told by Syrian Refugees

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Table of Contents

Preface	5
Introduction	8
Stories	
Iben Kanawat and Iben Atil	12
The Heaviest and the Lightest of All	15
Whether it Rains or Not, we Shall Cry	19
Arzeh and Anbar	22
The Lion, the Man, and the Glue Pot	26
The Bewitched Camel	30
Fallen Men Spoil Virtuous Women	37
The Ram and the Wolf	42
The Porter and the Saddle	45
The Woman and the King's Treasury	48
The King and his Three Daughters	53
A Lion in his Own House	58
Jaradeh and Asfour	61
Hab el Loz	66
The Lemon Fruit	70

The King's Daughter's Earring	75
The Horse's Head	78
An Hour of Your Time	82
Advice in Exchange for a Camel	84
Hdeidan is the Last Man Standing!	89
Mohammad ash Shater and his Sister, the Ogre	92

Preface: The Hakawati project

An active and living tradition of oral storytelling still exists in Syria and in other countries of the Middle East. These stories, or rather folktales, capture social and moral values, entertainment and heroic epics. They have existed throughout generations mainly in oral tradition and can be considered as a common denominator for solidarity across ethnic, geographic, and religious boundaries. In order to contribute to the preservation of this intangible cultural heritage the Hakawati project was initiated by the Swedish foundation Cultural Heritage without Borders in January 2014, with financial support from the Swedish Postcode Lottery. A close collaboration was established early on between CHwB and the Hakaya network represented by the Arab Education Forum (Jordan), the Arab Resource Collective for Popular Arts – Al Jana (Lebanon), and Al Balad theatre (Jordan), and in association with Fabula Storytelling (Sweden). Within its framework, six Syrian researchers in Lebanon and Syria collected more than 250 stories and a selection of 21 traditional stories has been made and published in this bi-lingual (Arabic -English) anthology

Initially, one of the questions regarding this project concerned its timeliness. At a time when Syrians are suffering from displacement, imprisonment, killing and destruction of their homes and livelihoods, it could have been inappropriate to ask about traditional stories. However, this apprehension was dispelled with the first narratives collected, as people were eager to remember and share their stories. During the collection process the lead researcher expressed amazement at the diversity of the traditions in these stories, something that actually reflects the diversity within Syria itself. Furthermore, and in addition to the wealth of stories

that have been collected, the collection process revealed that people within the age group of 30-50 years represented the majority of the ones who volunteer their stories: the older generation no longer tells, and the younger ones no longer listen.

This anthology is not only meant to archive these stories, but give them a second life to be read and told by new generations of Syrians wherever they may be, as well as introduce the world to these exciting folk tales. Before transforming them into written text, a residency was organized in cooperation with Al Balad theatre and Fabula Storytelling during the Seventh Hakaya festival in Amman in September 2014. This residency brought together 12 storytellers from Palestine, Jordan, Lebanon, Syria, and Sweden to transform some of these stories into repertoires for the storytellers to use in their future performances as one means to ensure that the stories will continue to have a life of their own. The next step was to transform the oral stories into written text, both colloquial and classical, and a renowned writer and editor with Palestinian, Jordanian, and Syrian roots, Zulaikha Abu Risha, accepted to undertake this difficult task. She reviewed all 55 stories selected by Paul Mattar who supervised the research process at ARCPA/Al Jana in Lebanon, and shortlisted 34 followed by another shortlist of 28 to end up with 21 stories that are included in this book. The stories were then translated into English by Serene Huleileh to be edited by Irish storyteller Jack Lynch and simultaneously recorded by two renowned Syrian storytellers/actors: Nimer Salamun and May Skaff. In every one of these steps a new layer was added to these stories whether by the editor or translator or storyteller, or even by the artistic medium itself. The anthology will be distributed as widely as possible in Sweden and in the MENA region, and will be accompanied by storytelling performances organized by Fabula storytelling in Sweden, Al Balad theatre in Jordan, and Al Jana in Lebanon. The performances will ensure that these stories continue to live on in the hearts, minds and traditions of Syrians, host populations in the region and elsewhere in the world.

Stories are what we are made of, and if we lose our stories we risk losing touch with our humanity and our identity. We strongly believe that through the enhancement of this thousand-year-old heritage of storytelling the Hakawati project has a potential to bridge ethnic, political and religious divides and hopefully build better understanding between people.

About the Partners:

Cultural Heritage without Borders (CHwB) is a Swedish NGO, operating in different areas around the world to protect material and immaterial cultural property threatened by war, natural disasters, abuse, poverty or political and social conflicts. The Foundation undertakes cultural heritage initiatives with special emphasis on dialogue and interaction as a means to promote democratic values and practices.

Hakaya is a Pan-Mediterranean network connecting 13 organizations around the Mediterranean in addition to numerous groups and individuals who believe in the centrality of "stories" in individual development and cultural growth.

The Arab Education Forum is a non-governmental, not-for-profit organization active in the Arab World since 1998 in the field of community and youth work. The mission of AEF is to contribute to an Arab cultural regeneration project that springs out of the inherent knowledge and experiences within the Arab societies. AEF constantly attempts to develop a shared vision related to learning in the Arab world; a vision that springs out of authentic initiatives which start with and build on what people do and what culture has.

ARCPA/ Al-JANA works with communities that face marginalization in Lebanon in documenting and disseminating their empowering experiences and cultural contributions. Stemming from its work in the arts, AL-JANA produces learning and creative resources by and for children and youth, believing in their creative capacity as agents of change: deeply rooted in their community's history and culture yet able to look at the world with critical eyes and express themselves openly and creatively.

Al Balad theatre is a multi-purpose artistic and community space established by renovating an old cinema house in down town Amman built in the 1940's. The space aims to promote young artists from Jordan and the region by presenting their works, providing rehearsal space, and contributing to strengthening the cultural movement in Jordan through interaction and cooperation with all performing art groups, NGOs, and individuals, public and private, in Jordan, the region, and the world.

Fabula storytelling is a storytelling company that operates throughout the whole of Sweden, the Nordic countries and many others. They create educational courses for everything from stage artists to businesses, schools and organisations, and produce shows for adults, youth and children.

Introduction

This book contains a collection of 21 folktales that have been saved from potential loss as a result of human flight from the raging war in Syria today. While almost every person inevitably retains their childhood memories and carries them with him/her wherever they may go, including all the stories told by our mothers, grandmothers, and the elderly, yet the recording of these stories remains a mission of humanitarian rescue to salvage a fraction of the meaning of the homeland, and a small portion of the culture and memory of refugees.

What's amazing about these stories collected from internally displaced Syrians and Syrian refugees in Lebanon is that they represent to a large extent the general characteristics of folktales: their aesthetics and expression of people's dreams and opinions of authority, women, money, the metaphysical, love, beauty, marriage, good, and evil, amongst others. Given that folktales have always been a basic and non-costly form of entertainment which does not require anything more than a wild imagination and an eloquent tongue, nevertheless they still carry – or some of them at least do- a didacticism in the form of rejecting a custom or presenting a moral or lesson, given that children are their primary audience. They also have a cathartic dimension when the storyteller and the listener empathize with the victim or the victor in a way that releases the feelings of fear, misery, pain and joy that the plot stirs in the listeners.

Folk tales by definition are tales told by one person as told to them by another

and so on and so forth. The teller can be a parent or a grandparent or a professional storyteller, but the author is usually anonymous, and the storyteller can add and delete as he/she wishes in accordance with their purpose of telling that specific story there and then. If the objective is didactic then the teller will add a moral, and if it is only for fun he/she will add comic incidents and puns. The storyteller can alter everything in the story: the language used, classical or dialect; they can identify with one character and tell the story in the first person; they can insert their opinion, or offset their poverty by telling of the sudden riches that befall their story's characters. This literary genre is also a democratic space for people to criticize their oppressive rulers and describe the ugliest forms of oppression, yet at the same time they manage, in the story at least, to overcome despotism by using their wiles on certain occasions and their brains on others.

I was asked to edit this book and complete four tasks: choose a number of stories out of 55 that were selected by Paul Mattar, the lead researcher; edit the selected stories in colloquial Arabic; re-write them in classical Arabic; and finally contribute to developing a title for the book. I tried to edit without restraint, and explain and comment and add in footnotes an explanation of some phrases and their cultural connotation. I also made sure to document all the towns that the storytellers come from in Syria, to complete the archive of the memory that was forced into exile and revive it by adding a description so that the book will be a testimony to those places!

I also dared intervene in the language of the storyteller as well as in reconstructing certain characters and events, paying special attention not to infringe on the spirit of the story or its backbone. I based this re-writing on the stories I heard in my childhood from my mother and other elders in our big house, and the stories of 1001 Nights, as well as other sources of popular literature. And in order not to repeat the relationships or the professions (the woodcutter said, the king's daughters came, the woodcutter's wife looked, etc…) I gave names to certain characters in accordance with the context, like Faheem and Naim in "The Lemon Fruit." Some names were based on famous names from the 1001 Nights like: "Wajh al Suboh" and "Badr el Tamam" in the "Enchanted Camel". I also gave titles to some stories where none was given, and changed other titles to better suit the plot. I also edited some stories to

remove as much as possible all politically incorrect references, or stereotyping or judgments or sexism. However, despite all my best efforts, I couldn't make the rulers just, because decapitation always threatened the heroes whenever they made contact with this King or that Sultan. Removing this reference would have inevitably destroyed the folk tale itself and transformed it into a contemporary narrative when our main purpose is to keep it a reflection of the concerns of the storytellers themselves.

Zulaikha Abu Risha
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Amman, January 2015

Iben Kanawat and Iben Atil

Iben[1] Kanawat[2] and Iben Atil[3]

Storyteller: **Jaber Abboud**, 42 years
Town: Soueidaa, Sleem

Iben (the son of) Kanawat met Iben (the son of) Atil on the road between the two villages, and the latter borrowed 1000 liras from the former, promising to repay him as soon as possible. A month passed by and Iben Atil was nowhere to be seen. When Iben Kanawat went to pay him a visit and demanded his 1000 liras, Iben Atil denied ever borrowing that amount. Iben Kanawat then went to Abu Assaf the Judge, and told him the story of how he had loaned Iben Atil 1000 liras under a tree between Kanawat and Atil and how the latter had denied ever taking the money!

The judge then ordered his bailiff to bring Iben Atil to stand before him, and asked him if he had, in fact, borrowed 1000 liras from Iben Kanawat. This he denied, so the judge asked Iben Kanawat:

> Do you remember the exact location where he borrowed the money from you?

He answered "yes", so he told him:

> Go get me a stone from that place so I can believe you!

1 Iben – pronounced Eeben- literally means "the son of", and in this case it refers to a man from the village of Kanawat (the son of Kanawat) and a man from the village of Atil (the son of Atil).

2 Kanawat is a village7 kms north east of Soueida, famous for its houses made of basalt stone and arched entryways, topped by modern buildings made from cement and stone. Its name in the Cananite era was Kanata and it was inhabited in pre historic times. It is one of the oldest and most important towns in the Souedia governorate and one of the ten cities of the Decapolis.

3 Atil is a village north of Soueida full of archaeological ruins. (http://www.discover-syria.com/bank/5611).

He then ordered Iben Atil to wait. It was a hot summer, and the weather that day was scorching, so after an hour had elapsed the judge started pretending to be sleepy, yawning and stretching his arms, and Iben Atil naturally caught the contagion and felt sleepy as well. The Judge then suddenly asked him:

Is the place where he went far from here?

And Iben Atil answered:

Not very far!

So you think he would have reached it by now?

Yes, yes, he must have reached it!

And then the Judge said:

Go get the 1000 liras, and don't waste any more of my time!

And when Iben Kanawat came back he told the Judge:

Judge… here is the stone!

And the Judge answered:

And here are your 1000 Liras, no more and no less.

The Heaviest and the Lightest of All

The Heaviest and the Lightest of All

Storyteller: **Samir Amer**, 47 years
Town: Soueidaa, Sweimry, currently resides in Al Maslakh neighbourhood

Once upon a time there was a prince whose wife simply didn't understand him. They were always fighting and he always told her:

> It's not your fault, it's your father's fault because he didn't teach you good manners.

They grew old and the strife between them continued as ever before. Their three sons also grew up and got married, and they each moved to a different town.

One day the prince got really mad at his wife who just didn't understand him, and as usual he said:

> It's not your fault, it's your father's fault because he didn't raise you well!

This time however, he wanted to divorce her and send her back to this failure of a father of hers. However, he hesitated, thinking:

> What would be the children's reaction? What would my reputation be like in front of my people?

So he came up with a brilliant idea that would justify to his princely conscience what he was about to do. He gave his wife a riddle and asked her to take it to her father who didn't teach her good manners. If he solved the riddle the prince would forgive her and her father; but if he didn't, he would have both their heads chopped off! The riddle was as follows:

> What is the lightest thing of all? And what is the heaviest thing of all?

The woman went to her father's house and told him about her husband's latest whim and how both their lives were at stake if he didn't answer the riddle correctly. She then asked him the two questions:

> What is the lightest thing of all? And what is the heaviest thing of all?

Her father answered:

> That's simple! The lightest thing of all is cotton and the heaviest thing of all is lead.

The woman slept that night at her father's house, and the next morning she thanked him and set off back home. On the way, she passed through her eldest son's town and decided to stop by and see him to tell him how much she missed him. She went to his house and, after greetings, she told him the story of the riddle and her father's answer and he, too, thought it was a good answer.

She then moved on to her middle son's village and he, too, approved of his grandfather's answer. When she reached her youngest son's house and told him the story, he warned her against giving his father the answer she had been given by his father because it was wrong, and instead, he told her:

> The lightest of all are the bountiful and the heaviest of all are the destitute.

He then added:

> Don't tell my father that I gave you this answer!

The woman thanked her son and said goodbye and walked back to her house in the next village. When she saw her husband, the prince, she passed on the answer to the riddle: "The lightest of all are the bountiful and the heaviest of all are the destitute."

He was pleased with the answer but told her:

> I don't think that your father gave you this answer. Did you pass by our youngest son's house?

She denied this, of course, for fear that he would find out the truth, but the wily prince whispered in the ear of one of his servants and the latter went outside the house and returned yelling:

My lord, my lord, a dotted snake has bitten the little prince…

The woman then impulsively screamed:

Oh my God, how could that be, I just saw him and he was fine!

The prince then knew for certain that the youngest son was the one who had answered the riddle. And when he asked him, he confessed, upon which his father told him:

I will give you another riddle and if you know the answer I will give amnesty to you, your mother, and your grandfather. But if you don't, I will order all of you to be decapitated!

Then he asked him:

If you are the judge in charge of the treasury and a bountiful man comes to you with a destitute one, how will you judge between them?

And the youngest son said:

I will take from the bountiful and give to the destitute.

What if two destitute men come to you?

I will take money from the treasury and give to both of them.

What if two bountiful men come?

The son answered:

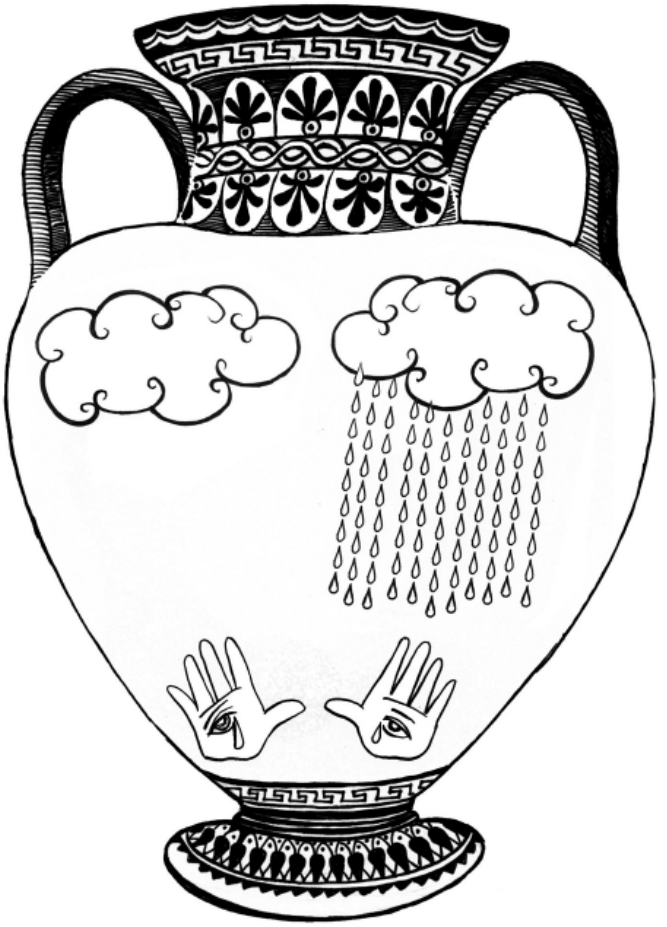
I don't think two bountiful men will need the treasury!

And the prince said:

Son, you are wiser than your mother and grandfather.

And he immediately relinquished his throne and appointed his son prince of the country and forgave his wife and father-in-law.

Whether it Rains or Not, We Shall Cry



Whether it Rains or Not, We Shall Cry

Storyteller: **Marwan Al Shaarani**, 58 years
Town: Al Door, currently resides in Al Soueida

Once upon a time there was a farmer who only had two daughters, and both of these girls married men from other villages: the first one married a rich farmer, and the second one married a potter.

Many years passed and neither of the two daughters came to visit their parents, so the woman told her husband:

> My dear husband, we haven't seen the girls in a very long time, and I'm worried about them. Please go and visit them and make sure they are OK. I'm growing old and I want to see them before I die.

The next day, the farmer packed his food parcel and rode his donkey, praising God and asking for His protection on his way to see his first daughter.

When he arrived at the house of the daughter who was married to the farmer, she welcomed her father warmly. His son-in-law slaughtered a sheep in his honour and they cooked and ate and drank and stayed up all night under the light of the full moon.

The next morning, before leaving his daughter, he asked her how she was, something which he didn't want to do in front of her husband, and she answered:

> My dear father… Look to the East, what do you see?
>
> A ploughed piece of land!
>
> Look to the West… look to the South… look to the North, what do you see?

He answered:

> Ploughed lands!
>
> These are all our lands, and we plough and plant them every year with wheat, barley, lentils, and chick-peas. All that we ask from God is to send rain so that our plants will grow. Please pray to God for a lot of rain because without it we will become poor!

As he left his first daughter and headed towards his second daughter, whose husband was a potter, he was muttering all the way:

> Dear God, let it rain, Dear God, let it rain, Dear God, let it rain...

When he arrived there, his daughter and her husband both welcomed him warmly and spread the table with good food. They ate and drank and stayed up all night talking. On the morning of the next day, as he was preparing to return to his village, he asked his daughter how she was doing and she answered:

> My dear father… Look to the East, what do you see?

He answered:

> Lands full of clay!
>
> Look to the West, look to the South, look to the North, what do you see? These are lands full of the clay that we use to make our pottery: urns and jars and pots and other earthen ware. Please, father, pray to God that it doesn't rain, because the rain will dissolve the clay and make us poor!

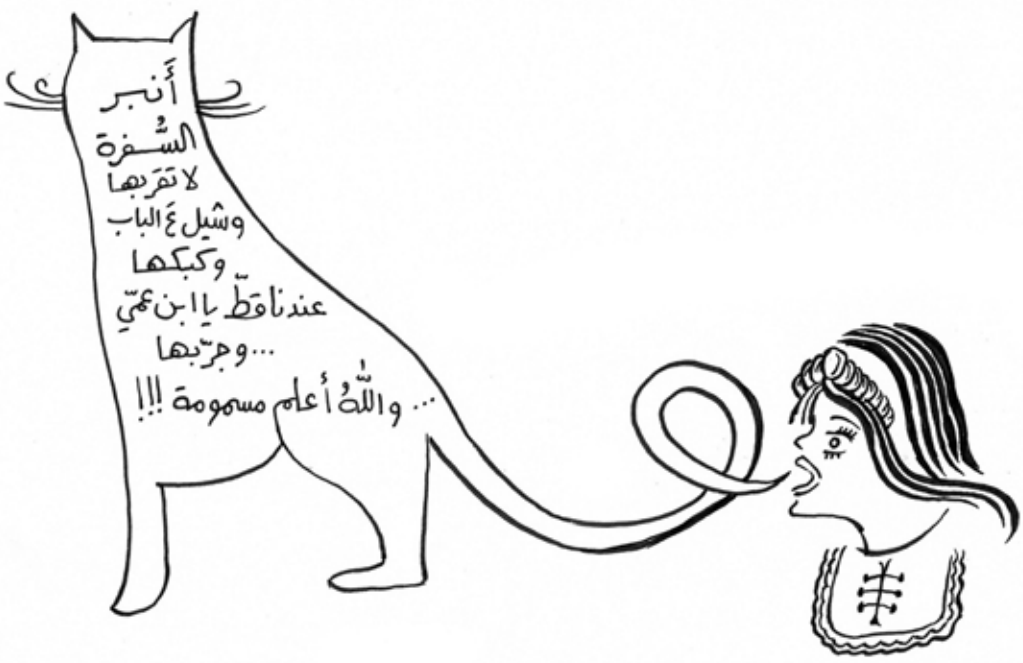
The farmer bade his daughter goodbye and, as he rode away on his donkey, he prayed:

> Dear God, let it not rain / Dear God, let it rain
>
> Dear God, let it not rain / Dear God, let it rain

Until he reached his village, and when his wife asked him how their daughters were, he answered:

> If it rains we shall cry
>
> And if it doesn't rain we shall also cry!

Arzeh and Anbar
(Cedar and Spruce)



Arzeh and Anbar (Cedar and Spruce)

Storyteller: **Ibtissam Mustafa Banto**, 38 years
Town: Harasta, currently resides in Sidon, Lebanon

Once upon a time there was a girl called Arzeh (Cedar) and her cousin was called Anbar (Spruce). They were in love. And from the day they were born their families always said: Arzeh will marry Anbar, and Anbar will marry Arzeh. However, after both fathers died, it became apparent that Arzeh's mother did not look kindly upon Anbar, and, without mincing words, she told her daughter that she opposed this marriage that her husband had blessed. When she realized that Arzeh was adamant and determined to marry Anbar, she moved house to a faraway neighbourhood. Anbar started searching for her, jumping from one roof to another until he found their house. When the mother saw him she decided to poison him as a last resort, and invited him to lunch the next day. But Arzeh realised that this woman was planning evil and went up on the roof before Anbar arrived and started singing:

Anbar do not touch the fare / Grab and throw it out the door

Give it to the cat to be sure / 'Tis poisoned, God knows I'm sincere!

Anbar do not touch the fare / Grab and throw it out the door

Give it to the cat just to be sure / 'Tis poisoned, God knows I'm sincere!

Anbar heard his cousin's warning song, so when he arrived at her house, he gave his plate of food to the cat to eat and it died on the spot, so Anbar got up and left.

Days later, he missed his cousin and went to her house, and his uncle's wife started singing:

Two Ogres kidnapped Arzeh / Took her to Teetlan Valley

Anbar you must rush to rescue / Arzeh, your cousin and your love

So Anbar set off to Teetlan Valley. This was a scary valley inhabited by ogres, but one of the neighbors who had heard the mother's song told him that Arzeh had not been kidnapped but was washing her clothes by the river. He made his way to the river and when he saw Arzeh he hugged her with joy. On their way back, Arzeh's bracelet fell between the thorns and, as she picked it up, a thorn pierced her hand and droplets of blood stained her dress, but she continued on her way with her cousin. When her mother saw them and saw the blood on Arzeh's dress she started singing:

Arzeh, what's with the blood on your dress? / God bless the womb that brought you to life

I hope that Anbar has not defiled you / His skin is akin to a that of a mouse and darker than soot!

Arzeh answered:

Oh mother, Anbar is gallant and kind / Oh mother, Anbar is gallant and kind

Oh mother, Anbar's eyes are black as night / And they flatter my white skin

The woman took her daughter into the house, kicking Anbar out, and started beating and torturing her. Whenever Anbar came to see his love, her mother would make up another story to keep them away from each other. Finally Anbar decided to officially ask for Arzeh's hand in marriage to put an end to the endless tortures of her devious mother. He came to her house and knocked assertively on the door. When the mother opened the door Anbar expressed his formal wish to marry Arzeh. The woman pretended to consent, and asked for 1001 camels as a dowry, and a house, and ten maids, and jewelry worth 2000 golden dinars.

Anbar left feeling sad because he didn't have any of the dowry she requested. So he decided to travel to faraway lands in search for wealth. He spent seven years saving penny after penny to collect the dowry for his beloved Arzeh.

His uncle's wife, however, after she had learned that Anbar had left the country, forced her daughter to marry another man, ignoring her wailing and crying day and night. On her wedding day Arzeh drank poison and died, and the wedding

turned into a wake. When Anbar returned bearing money, jewellery, gold, and maids, they told him that Arzeh had died! He ran and ran until he reached her grave where he threw himself down and cried for days, without food or drink. Finally he took his last breath and died next to his beloved, and they buried him in the same grave as Arzeh.

They were united in death because her mother refused to unite them in life.

And toota toota

So ends our Hadoota[4]…

4 Hadoota in Arabic means short tale.

The Lion, the Man, and the Glue Pot

The Lion, the Man, and the Glue Pot

Storyteller: **Wael Radwan**, 60 years
Town: Al Soueida

Once upon a time the lion in the forest stretched his limbs and looked around him with arrogance, asking the other animals in the forest:

Am I not the strongest being on this earth?

The animals answered:

No, the human being is the strongest.

He asked where could he find him and they said:

Roam the earth and search for him. You might find him!

He strode away roaming the earth in search of the human being and came upon antelopes grazing. He asked them:

Are you human beings?

And they answered:

No sir, human beings are scary. We fear them terribly!

After a while he saw a pack of bulls and he asked them:

Is the human being amongst you?

No, sir, we are bulls. Human beings use us to plough their land whether we like it or not!

He walked and walked until he got tired. So he lay down to rest and saw a camel grazing nearby. He asked him:

> Hey, you, are you a human being?
>
> No, no, brother, I am a camel. The human being uses me to carry heavy weights and to carry him for months on end to do the pilgrimage, without any right to complain or cry! Look at him, he is herding 1000 camels all on his own!
>
> What is this human being? Where can I find him?
>
> Look over there! He is under that tree smoking a cigarette while the cattle plough his land. Go to him.

The lion went to see this creature and after saluting him he asked if he was a human being and he answered that he was. The lion said:

> I want to wrestle with you to decide who is the strongest being on this earth.

The human answered:

> I can't do that now, I'm busy ploughing my land. How about we meet here again this afternoon?

The lion agreed, and at the set time he arrived and found that the human being had started a fire and had placed on it a pot with boiling glue and water. The lion roared and asked:

> Are you ready man?
>
> Yes, I am ready!

The lion dug his claws in the ground and charged. The human being lifted the pot and cried:

> Ya Allah (Dear God)[5], and threw its contents over the lion, who ran away screaming from the burns he suffered. When the other lions saw him they asked him:
>
> What's wrong? Why is your skin badly scorched?

5 In Arabic before starting on a difficult task one usually says: *Ya Allah*, asking for help from God to undertake this difficult task.

He told them the story and they asked:

> What will you do now?

He replied :

> We have to attack him all together and devour him!

The lions walked behind him until they reached the land of the human being. When he saw them from a distance he climbed a high palm tree and hid there. The lions were at a loss as to how to get to him and then the scorched lion suggested that they climb on top of one another until they could reach and grab him. The scorched lion stood at the bottom and the lions stood one by one on top of each other. When they had almost reached him, the human being cried out:

> Ya Allah[6] (Dear God).

When the scorched lion heard those two words he remembered the hot glue and ran away in fear, bringing down all the other lions who screamed at him:

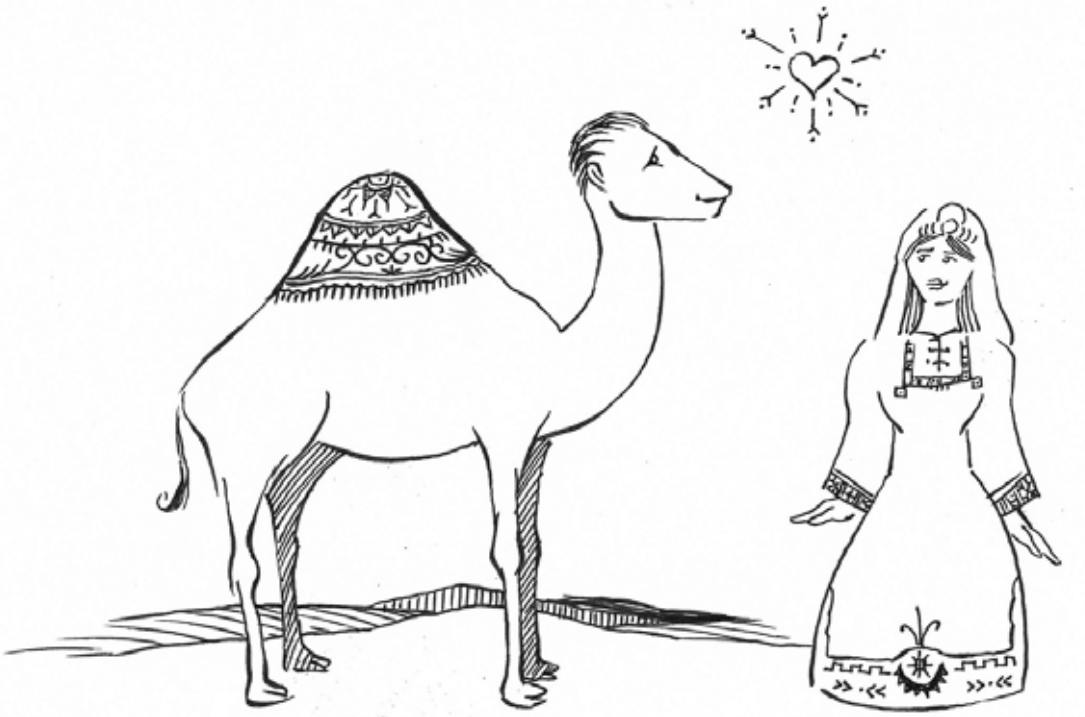
> why did you do that to us?

And the lion answered:

> If you haven't experienced the glue pot you can never understand my reaction!

6 This phrase is also used when a person feels at a loss and about to experience suffering, a way of asking God to help him tolerate the upcoming suffering.

The Bewitched Camel



The Bewitched Camel

Storyteller: **Mahmoud Fares**, 30 years
Town: Khan el Sheikh Camp[7], currently resides in Sidon, Lebanon

Once upon a time there was a woodcutter who made a living from cutting wood in the forest. One day he went there to collect wood and found a big log too heavy for him to carry on his own. He looked to the right and then to the left and saw a camel who seemed lost. He caught the camel and put the log on his back and went to the market to sell it, and then headed back home. He put the camel in a separate room and gave him some barley that his wife had ground for their food, and patted the camel's head and thanked him for his help.

In the morning, the woodcutter went into the room to check on his new camel and to prepare him to go to work with him, only to find that the camel had produced a golden egg. With joy and surprise beyond belief he hid the golden egg and rode the camel out into the forest. The same thing happened again and again for days - the camel would produce a golden egg which the woodcutter would hide in a safe place.

One day the woodcutter was selling his wood when he heard the chief merchant announcing that all men must leave the market because the king's daughter needed to visit the shops. This they did, including the woodcutter, who left his camel in front of a shop. The king's daughter passed by, looking at the merchandise, and the

7 Khan esh Sheikh is a Palestinian refugee camp near the old ruins of Khan esh Sheikh village 27 kilometers south west of Damascus. The Khan was originally a bed and breakfast for caravans heading from Damascus to the south west. The refugee camp was established in 1949 over an area of 0.69 square kilomters and provided refuge for the first wave of Palestinian refugees from northern Palestine in 1948.

camel saw her and immediately fell in love! When his owner took him back home, he would no longer eat or drink, nor produce a golden egg. The woodcutter was surprised and told his wife to take the camel for a walk - perhaps the smell of fresh air would bring him back to normal. The woman took him for a walk around town and, as she passed in front of the king's castle, the camel stood still, refusing to advance any further. The woman urged him to move but he wouldn't budge and, when she asked him why, the camel told her that he loved the king's daughter and wanted to marry her!

The woman told her husband the camel's story, and how he insisted on being betrothed to the king's daughter! The woodcutter was at a loss, and tried to convince the camel to change his mind - but to no avail! The woodcutter then put on his best clothes and went to the king's castle and requested to meet him. Then, in the king's presence, he asked for the hand of his daughter for his camel!

The king went mad at this strange request, but his wise minister calmed him down and convinced him to order the woodcutter to perform miracles, saying that if he did, he would give his daughter in marriage to his camel, and if not, he would cut his and his camel's heads off! The minister reasoned that this was a joke and would provide entertainment for the king and would relieve some of the stress that comes with ruling such a big kingdom.

The king cleared his throat and said to the woodcutter:

> Bring me a bunch of grapes that everyone can eat from without it diminishing! If you don't bring it here in the morning I will have you and your camel beheaded, and if you do I will allow your camel to marry my daughter!

The woodcutter left the castle, returning home sad and downcast and when he told the camel of the king's wish the camel said:

> Don't worry, everything will look better in the morning light…

In the morning, the woodcutter found, next to the camel, a golden plate on which was a fresh bunch of grapes with dew drops shimmering on each grape. He took it to the king who ate a few grapes, and gave it to the minister and the entourage and they all ate - yet the bunch of grapes did not diminish by even one grape. The king was upset at the success of the woodcutter in performing this miracle, so he gave him another impossible task to accomplish:

> I want a carpet that can extend to cover the castle and all the streets of the city…

The woodcutter told the camel of this new order, and the camel said:

> Don't worry, everything will look better in the morning light…

He slept deeply, while the woodcutter kept turning in his bed. In the morning he found, next to the camel, a golden chest containing a carpet made of silk and golden threads. He took it to the castle and there the king ordered that the carpet be opened. The slaves started opening it and spreading it to cover the hallways, and the more it covered the longer and wider it grew, until it covered all the streets and alleys of the city! The king was amazed at the skill of the woodcutter, and made his last demand:

> I want to wake up in the morning and find on the empty plot of land next to my castle another huge castle that reaches the clouds, and everything inside it made of gold!

The king never thought that any human could achieve this feat, let alone an animal! But this was exactly what happened. When the woodcutter went home frightened at the difficulty of this request, the camel calmed him down saying:

> Don't worry, everything looks better in the morning light…

In the morning, which didn't seem any better than the night, the woodcutter made his way anxiously to the castle and, there beside it, he saw a glorious palace that no eye had ever seen, nor ear had ever heard of, nor any human had ever thought of! He went into the king's castle, and walked into the main hall to find the king sad and grim. This whole thing had started out as a joke and now had become a scary reality: how will he marry his daughter off to a camel? What will people say? What if he doesn't fulfil his promise, how can he face his conscience and God? How will his little one accept the idea of this marriage? All these thoughts crossed the king's mind as he was sitting on his throne in front of his ministers and entourage and the woodcutter - all waiting for a word from him. Finally he said to the woodcutter:

> Alright… your camel will marry my daughter tomorrow.

He immediately got up to tell his daughter of his decision. She cried and whined but he rebuked her saying:

> I made a promise and must keep my word – otherwise I will gain a reputation as a liar!

So the wedding took place and the king's daughter was married to her groom, the camel, and she entered with him into her chambers in the castle. When night fell she was surprised when the camel turned into a most beautiful and charming young man. She asked him about his secret and he told her that he had been put under a spell by a witch who lived underground. He warned her not to tell anyone, otherwise he would disappear from her life.

Time passed by and they were living happily together with their secret safely kept by the princess. Until a war erupted between the kingdom and some of its enemies, and everyone in the land, including the royal family, took part in the fight defending the kingdom. The camel, too, wanted to fight for his country and said to his wife:

> I will fight at night, and wear a mustard coloured suit, but you have to keep this a secret from everyone you know.

And so it was… and one day as the young camel/man was defending the king's tent he was wounded in the arm. The king ordered him to enter the tent and covered the wound with his royal handkerchief which had his seal and name. He returned home before sunrise, and when the war ended, his wife's sisters started boasting that all their husbands had taken part in the war - all except her husband, the camel. Without thinking, she answered that her husband did fight, wearing a mustard coloured suit, and gloriously defended her father and she told them of the handkerchief that the king had used to cover his wound! When the camel learnt that she had divulged his secret, he became angry and disappeared.

The king's daughter was greatly saddened by the disappearance of her husband, and told the whole story to her father, the king, who consulted his ministers, one of whom advised him to build a Hammam[8] in the market that gives free entry to anyone who tells a story that happened to him. And so it was and the news spread throughout the country until everyone came to the Hammam to bathe and they told many stories. However, none of them gave any inkling about the whereabouts of the disappeared son-in-law.

8 public bathhouse.

After the noise surrounding the Hammam and its stories had subsided, a poor widow living on the outskirts of the city heard that bathing in the Hammam was free by order of the King. So she carried her parcel which contained her loofah, soap, towel, bath bowl, and clean clothes, and headed to the city centre. At the Hammam they told her that in order to be allowed to enter she must tell a story that had happened to her. She had nothing to tell, she headed back home. But since it was a long way, and close to sundown, and the city doors would close soon, so she hesitated. What to do? She had no money to stay in one of the Khans so she looked right and left and saw a yard with many trees. She decided to climb one of them and spend the night there. Close to midnight, the woman felt the earth open and out came the most beautiful young man she had ever seen. His light overshadowed that of the full moon and he carried three apples, crying and singing:

> An apple for the dove
>
> An apple for the pigeon
>
> And an apple for my wife who didn't keep my secret.

He kept singing and crying all night until the first light came and then the earth opened up again and swallowed him. The widow witnessed all of this and descended immediately from the tree and went to the Hammam to tell her story. This is how the news came to the king and his daughter and they rushed to the tree to spend the night there. And when the earth split open and out came the young man crying and singing, the king's daughter jumped up and hugged him and held on to him tightly to prevent him from leaving her, sobbing:

> Why did you leave me?

And he answered:

> The witch turned me into a camel so that no other woman would have me. She has sentenced me to live with her underground if I am ever betrayed by a woman, and you did not keep the secret. You betrayed my trust!

She apologized and expressed her deep regret, asserting that she would never leave him no matter what! He took her with him underground and when the witch saw her and asked who she was, he pretended that she was a maid. The witch wanted

to test her and gave her a beaded broom and ordered her to clean the house without losing one bead, otherwise she would have to return above the ground. When the king's daughter started sweeping the house the beads kept falling and filled the house, so her husband quickly collected the beads and put them back on the broom. When the witch returned from her rounds outside she saw that the house was very clean and gave the king's daughter another impossible task to do: she gave her a chest and ordered her to take it to her sister's house in another country without opening it.

The king's daughter carried the chest with great difficulty and walked towards the witch's sister's house. On the way she wanted to take a rest and put the chest down. But it fell and its cover opened and out came snakes and monkeys who went all over the place. However, her husband was watching for the witch's tricks and he collected all the snakes and monkeys and put them back in the chest.

When the witch realized that the young man was in love with the maid she decided to marry him against his will, and said that if the maid did not dance at his wedding, she would put a curse on her. The king's daughter had no option but to grieve and cry. Her husband, the camel, tried to calm her down saying:

> Tomorrow, before the party starts, say that you will not dance unless they give you a lantern and a wick. I will take care of the rest!

They brought the burning lantern and wick to the king's daughter who carried them and danced. As she was dancing in the direction of the groom he grasped the flaming lantern from her and threw it on the witch who was burnt and died. With her death the curse was removed and he was now free to return back above the ground and they both made their way back to the king's castle. The guards immediately informed the king that his daughter had returned with a strange young man. When the king saw them he checked the young man's arm and saw his handkerchief with his seal and hugged them both and prepared a second wedding worthy of the bride and groom!

Everyone lived happily ever after, and had many boys and girls, until death did they part.

Fallen Men Spoil Virtuous Women

Fallen Men Spoil Virtuous Women

Storyteller: **Mahmoud Fares**, 30 years
Town: Khan el Sheikh Camp, currently resides in Sidon, Lebanon

Once upon a time there was a king who had three wives but he didn't get along too well with them. One day he went walking the roads of his kingdom to watch over his people, and while he was roaming the fields he saw an energetic farmer ploughing his land, all the time singing songs as he went back and forth with his plough. The king was amused, never having met such a happy farmer before. Everyone else was always tired and exhausted. So he decided to watch this man for a while, in the hope of finding out the reasons behind this apparent joy. He hid behind a tree and after a while he saw a woman approach the farmer carrying a sack that contained some water and bread and food. She poured water into the farmer's hands for him to wash with and drink and then they sat together to eat and talk. When they had finished eating, she collected the leftover food and utensils and left.

The king said to himself:

> Now I know why he's so happy and singing all the time - all the other farmers do not receive visits from their women, nor do their wives pass by to inquire about them!

The king then approached the farmer and greeted him and said:

> Oh farmer, I see you singing as you plough your land back and forth!

The man answered:

> Thank God, my work is going well and God has given me enough and more.

The king then asked:

> And the woman?

He answered:

> She is my wife, God bless her. She performs her duties as best as possible and never denies me anything!

The king said:

> I have three wives, but I don't get along with them, so how about I take your wife and you take my three wives instead? I will also give you a lot of money and furniture and slaves!

The farmer was afraid to say no to the king, so he agreed, knowing that he was under threat of death if he disobeyed.

The farmer divorced his wife, and the king divorced his three wives and, after the legal three months elapsed[9], the king married the farmer's wife, and the farmer wed the king's three wives and left the castle carrying gold and presents and slaves. On the way home, he came across a well containing cold water, so he stopped to take a rest and eat. As they were resting, the farmer asked his wives why the king was upset with them, and the first one said:

> I am a thief! I can't stop myself from stealing!

And the second one said:

> I can't stay away from men!

And the third one said:

> I can't stop lying!

So he told the third wife to bring water from the well, and as she approached he was tempted to push her in but changed his mind and instead divorced her and left her there. The other two asked:

> What have you done!?

9 In Islam, a divorce is not final until three months have elapsed to make sure that the wife is not with child.

And he answered:

> There is no remedy for lying…

They continued walking without the third wife towards the farmer's house and when they arrived he told the thieving one:

> Look, you will find my money and gold in this box, you can steal from it as much as you like!

And he told the wife who loves men:

> You will pay the price for your sins in heaven! Look, there are two entrances to the house, one is at the front and one is at the back. If you bring any of your male-friends to the house let them in and out through the back door. Don't you dare let me see them or I will slaughter you both!

The next day, the farmer went out to check his plantation with his slaves. In his absence, the thieving wife was tempted to take the gold, but was restrained by the fact that he had left it in the open, and didn't hide it from her like the King used to do. So she shied away from betraying his trust and told himself:

> I will not only refrain from touching his money, but I will add to it from my own!

And every time he gave her a golden necklace or bracelet she added it to his money in the box.

The second wife told herself:

> This man trusted me, and left all the doors open, and will not chase me with his doubts day and night. As God is my witness, I will never betray him, and will not be with any other man!

Time went by, and after a while the king again decided to tour his kingdom and check on his people, and he passed – in disguise -- by the farmer on his land, thinking that he would find him sad and crying. But he found him singing, not one, but two songs, going back and forth. He kept watching him until at noon two women came carrying children and a parcel of food. One of them washed his hands and the other removed his headdress and offered him food.

The King was taken aback by this unexpected sight and after the women had left him, he came up to him and asked:

Hey farmer, what is this? Instead of one you sing two songs? And where is your third wife?

The farmer answered:

I divorced her.

The king asked:

Why?

He answered:

Oh King, there is no remedy for dishonesty. As for the thieving wife, I left everything at her hand's grasp, the gold, money and food… so she shied away from stealing. As for the one who loves men, I told her that God would hold her accountable for her sins, but that what concerned me was not to see her committing adultery. As the house has two doors, all she had to do was to let her man in and out from the back door so I didn't see him, and she has never seen another man again!

Here the king said:

How ironic! I took your chaste and honest wife, and now she steals and lies and goes out with other men!

The farmer answered:

Oh King, fallen men spoil virtuous women…

The king asked:

What do you mean?

And he answered:

Oh King, you are wise enough to understand my words !

The Ram and the Wolf

The Ram and the Wolf

Storyteller: **Salim Adwan** (76 years)
Town: Ein al Shoara[10], Mount Hermon, lived in Soueida

Once upon a time there were two rams, one plumb and chubby; and the other delicate and bony. The chubby goat was always boasting of his strength and beauty compared to the thin one. One day a hungry wolf found them grazing and asked the chubby goat:

What are those on your head?

And the goat answered:

Those are my horns, I use them to scratch my skin.

Then the wolf asked him:

What are those in your mouth?

These are my teeth, I use them to chew the grass when I'm hungry.

Then the wolf attacked him and devoured him bit by bit!

The next day, the wolf came and saw the thin and bony goat grazing. He said 'good morning' but the goat didn't answer. The wolf came forward and asked:

Hey you, what are those on your head?

And he answered:

Those are my horns that I will attack you with and slash your belly open and shred your intestines!

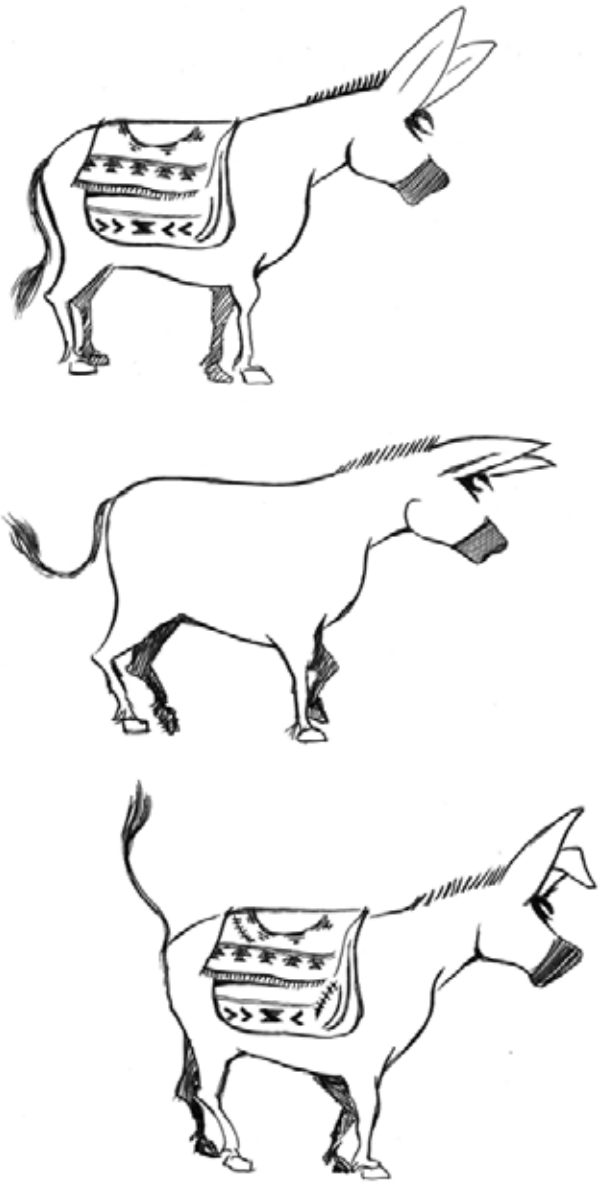
10 Ein Al Shoara is a village near Mount Hermon in the Qatana governorate, 65 kilometers away from Damascus and at 1450 meters above sea level.

And what are those in your mouth?

These are my sharp teeth that will devour you and gorge your eyes out if you come near me!

The wolf was so scared that he immediately ran away never to be seen in that neighbourhood again.

The Porter and the Saddle



The Porter and the Saddle

Storyteller: **Yazan Shaheen**, 27 years
Town: Al Soueida

Once upon a time there was a porter who carried people's luggage on his donkey. He used to spend part of his earnings and hide the other part inside the donkey's saddle. This porter had an only son who was living with him. One day, the porter went to visit his neighbour and asked his boy to pay attention to the saddle more than anything else in the house, and left.

While the boy was playing in front of the house with the door open, a Bedouin passed by and saw the saddle through the open door. He called on the boy and asked him if he could buy the saddle, especially since it was old and worn out. But the boy refused. The Bedouin kept insisting and implying that his father would be proud of him if he managed to sell a torn saddle. So, finally, the boy agreed and took the few piastres that the man gave him. When the father returned he found the saddle was gone and asked his son about it, so the boy gave him the few piastres and told him about the deal he had made with the Bedouin. The father went mad, but there was nothing to be done - the sword of fate is swifter than any man's doing! Because he no longer had a saddle, he couldn't use his donkey for his business, so he started working in the market as a saddle-mender. He could not overcome his sadness over the loss of his life savings but he had to work to make a living, so he kept saying to himself:

You may take a break but you cannot rest, for what's gone is gone!

Passers-by were surprised at his words and couldn't understand what he meant by them. One day, a Bedouin came to his shop carrying a torn saddle that he wanted

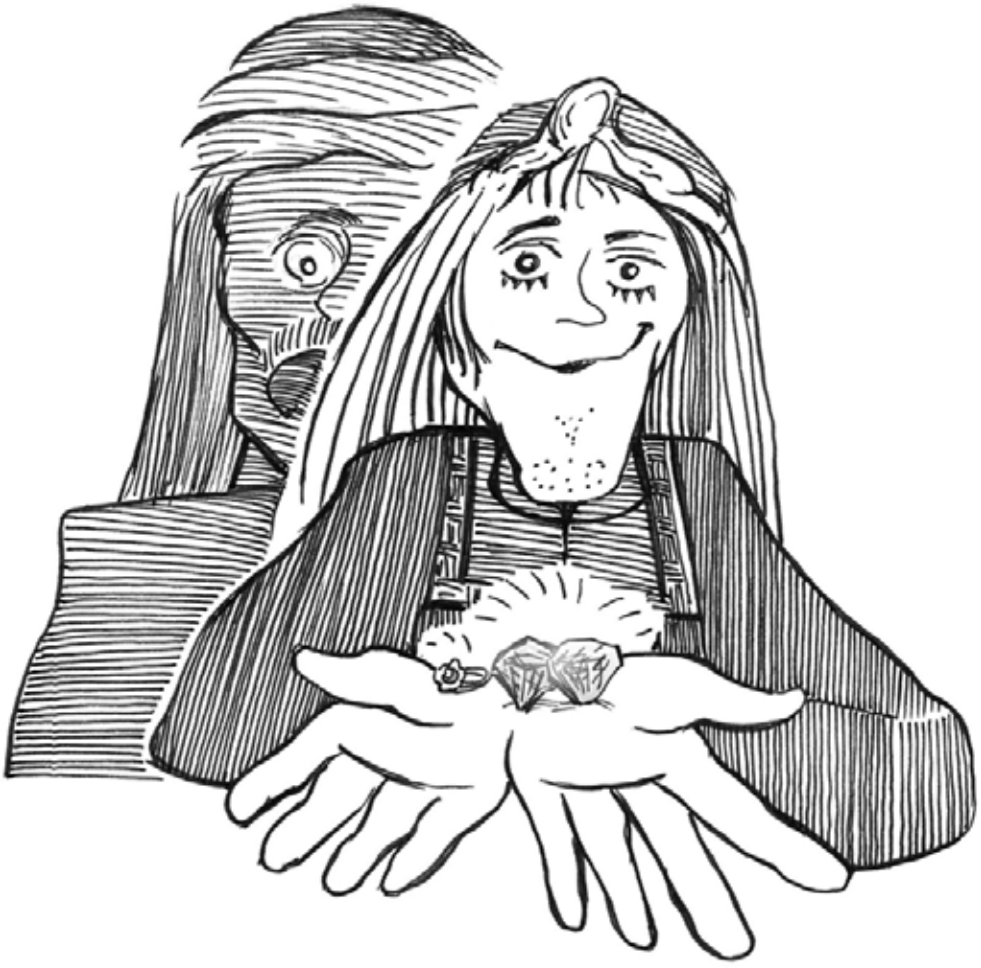
mended, and for free, because he was poor! The man looked at the saddle and immediately recognized it, so he said to the Bedouin:

> Sure, no problem, I will repair it for you. Come back tomorrow and it will be ready!

After the Bedouin left, he tore open the secret pocket and found all his savings, not a penny less. He started calling:

> Your possessions will never disperse, what's yours will always be yours!

The Woman and the King's Treasury



The Woman and the King's Treasury

Storyteller: **Sameeha Darwish Nabulsi**, 66 years
Town: Damascus, currently resides in Ein al Hilweh, Lebanon

Once upon a time there was a kind-hearted simpleton wife. This woman suffered greatly from her husband's treatment of her. He was nasty and sometimes beat her up. She endured his mistreatment because she had no one to go to, no relatives or family. To tolerate this life she used two means: the first was patience; and the second was good humour. One day her husband was so cruel to the extent that he kicked her out of his house. When she asked him where she should go because she had no one to support her, he said:

That's none of my business, I will have nothing to do with you!

The poor woman left the house stumbling on her dress, and kept walking until exhaustion caught up with her. She looked around in search of a place to sleep, only to find the garbage dump, and she said to herself:

This dump is better than that house… Here will I stay!

In the old times, the garbage dump was located at the outskirts of the village and was usually on a hill composed of manure where, with time, a green lawn grew. In the summer the villagers would have their picnics on this lawn and sit to watch the sunset.

Soon it was dark, and the woman was oscillating between crying because her husband had kicked her out of the house; and happy to be rid of him. Under the dump there was a cave that the woman couldn't see from where she was sitting, but as the lanterns in the village were turned off one by one and darkness spread its cloak, she started hearing whispers and murmurs. She listened carefully until

she realised that two people were talking to each other inside the dump. Soon she understood that they were the thieves who had stolen the king's camel with all its treasures. In fact, the camel carried the King's treasury and they were about to distribute the piles of gold and jewels they had stolen. But they were looking for a rope or something to tie the sacks that contained their spoils and all they could find was the woman's belt, which was dangling from the top of the cave's entrance. The eldest pulled at the belt, thinking it was a rope, and the woman cried at the top of her voice:

> Genie, Genie!

The thieves were terrified and thought that the police had raided the dump and they ran away leaving the booty behind with the camel that had been carrying it.

After the thieves had run away the woman entered the cave and saw the treasure on the ground and the camel resting inside with a lantern lighting up the space. Simpleton that she was, she said to the camel:

> Good evening, Mr. Flamey!

At that point the flame of the lantern swayed in the wind and she said:

> Oh, you are saying good evening, too? Warm greetings, too? Don't be afraid, I will only take a small portion from this pile, I won't let you down, and maybe some from this pile here, and that one there…

And so the woman took some diamonds, some gold, and some jewels and filled her pockets and hurried back to the house of the husband who had kicked her out. When she knocked on the door he came out yelling and threatening and she answered, laughing:

> Look… I brought some beads and copper and I can make myself a necklace and for you some rosary beads!

When he saw the gold and jewels he quickly ushered her into the house, fearing to be seen, and asked her – with sudden gentleness:

> Where did you get it from? Where?

She told him the story of the garbage dump and what she had found there and he got up immediately and went with her to the location and put all the loot on the camel and ran home to hide everything in a box he had. Then he slaughtered the

camel and threw his bones down the well. After that they cooked and ate his meat – keeping some for the winter! The man warned his wife not to mention any of this to anyone - otherwise he would throw her bones down the well with the camel! She assured him that her lips were sealed!

The next day, as she was sitting on the porch of her house the way villagers do, the king's messenger passed by, calling:

> Hear ye, hear ye, whoever saw the king's camel will receive half of the treasure and the king will keep the other half!

The woman heard the call and fidgeted around, dying to tell him about the camel yet fearing the consequences! However, she saw this as an opportunity to teach her hard-hearted husband a lesson and get half of the king's treasure in the process - something she would never have as long as it was in her husband's box! She called the king's messenger and told him that she had news about the camel. But when he saw that she was a plain woman and guessed that she was a simpleton, he didn't believe her and told her, evasively:

> Tomorrow you will come to the city and go to the treasury's bailiff and tell him everything you know.

He then went on spreading his message…

The next day she waited for her husband to go to work and then went to the treasury carrying some of the gold and jewels in her pockets. She stood in the presence of the bailiff in his plush office where many important people and guards were gathered. When she saw the bailiff she wondered to herself:

> Where have I seen this man? Where? Oh where??

When he asked her what she wanted she told him about the pieces of "beads and copper" that she had found, hiding her smile behind her handkerchief, showing him what she carried and telling him what her husband had done to the camel and its bones. When he asked her:

> Did your husband really do all that?

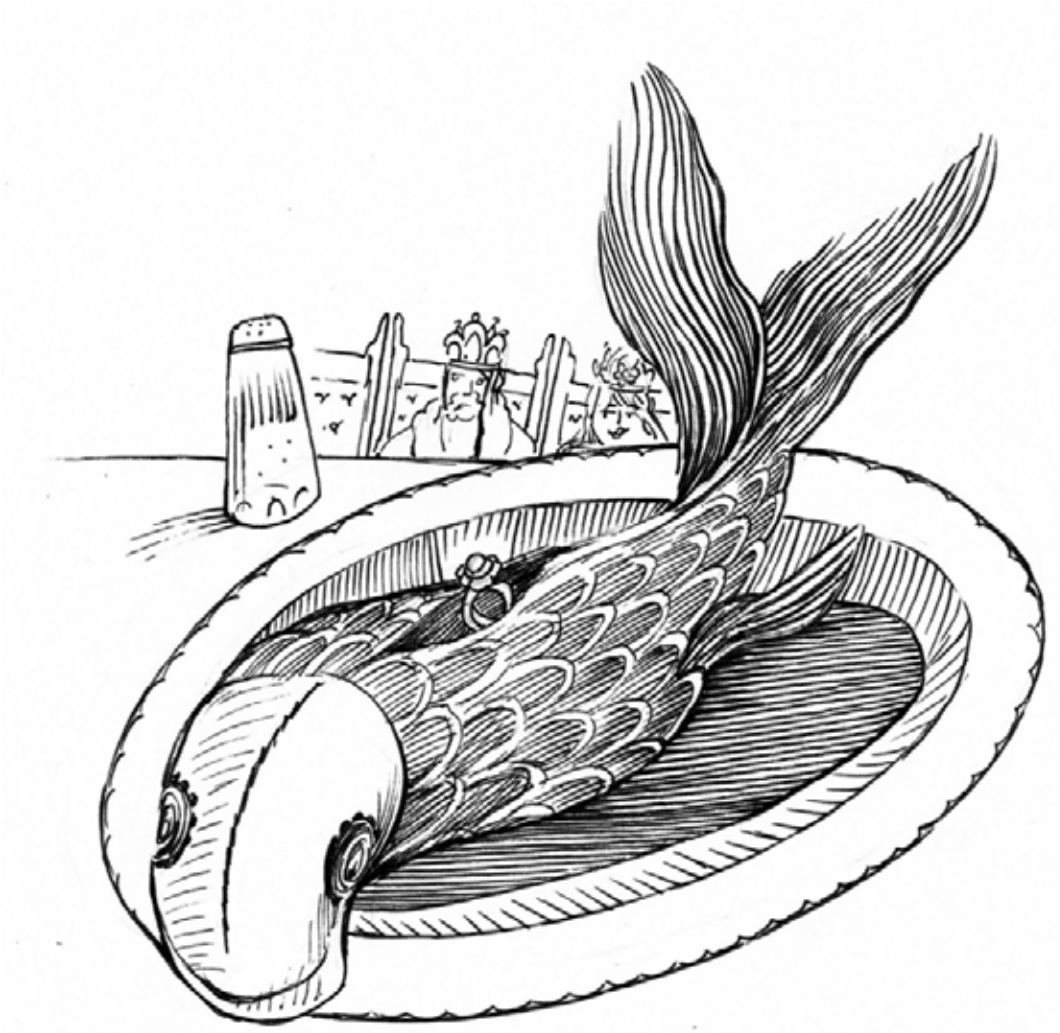
She answered:

> He did that and more and I can prove it to you: if you remember well, you have one blind eye, which is why at the garbage dump where you hid

your booty, you couldn't tell the difference between the belt of a dress and a rope!

When the bailiff heard that he got up to flee but the police officer who was there to investigate the robbery caught him and ordered, the husband to be brought in as well. Both of them were put in prison pending the King's judgement. As for the woman, she received half of the treasure, as the King had promised, and became rich for life. She no longer needed a husband who mistreated her in his house, or a passerby to take pity on her as she hid in a garbage dump!

The King and his Three Daughters



The King and his Three Daughters

Storyteller: **Ameera Saadeddin**
Town: Al Soueida

Once upon a time there was a King who had three daughters. And one day he decided to gauge how much they loved him. He asked the eldest:

How much do you love me, Shoalat az Zaman[11]?

She answered:

As much as humans love water!

He smiled and was pleased with the answer. Then he turned to the middle daughter and asked her:

How about you, Noor ad Duha[12]?

She answered:

As much as humans need air!

He was so happy that he laughed in ecstasy. Then he turned to his youngest daughter and asked her:

And her father's favourite, Wajh al Suboh[13]?

She answered:

As much as food needs salt!

11 Flame of the times.
12 Morning light.
13 Face of the morning.

The King frowned and turned away and became distressed at the insignificance of the answer and he ordered her to leave the castle, never to be seen there again. She left feeling despondent and disappointed at her father's reaction, saying to herself:

> One day my father will know what it is like for food to need salt!

She left the castle wearing a straw hat to hide her beautiful blonde hair and roamed from one city to another, working here and there, without finding her heart's content. Until fate took her to a faraway city where she decided to take a shortcut and, instead of looking for work any old place, she went directly to the castle of the King of that land. There she told the guards:

> Tell the King I'm a cook and I will make him food the like of which he has never tasted in his life!

The guards delivered her message to the King and her words increased his appetite, so he ordered her to be sent to the royal kitchen. The head chef wanted to test her so he asked her to make a soup and she did and it was delicious and the King enjoyed it tremendously and said:

> Now I can invite Kings to my table!

And, in fact, he immediately invited several Kings and esteemed personalities to a Gala dinner. After they had eaten and drunk they danced all night to the music.

Now, back to our princess-turned-chef, Wajh al Suboh. She went to wash and clean herself after all the cooking and took off her straw hat to wash her long hair and, after bathing, she wore a long silk princely dress and slipped in amongst the guests. And guess who saw her? The King's son, of course, and he asked her to dance. While they were dancing she asked for the ring he was wearing, which he immediately took off and gave to her. It was clear that royal love was in the air! Before the ball was over the girl quickly fled from the dancing hall, and went back to her kitchen and her straw hat. However, the King's son was not about to let this incident go unresolved and he started searching for the beautiful girl who had been with him at the ball but had then disappeared. He ordered the soldiers and guards to search for her but they couldn't find her - she had vanished into thin air! The King's son was so upset that he could no longer eat or drink and soon he fell ill. His father brought in the best doctors but all to no avail.

News of the bad state that the Prince was in was soon heard of throughout the

castle – not least by the kitchen staff, of course, because the food that was prepared for the prince was always returned almost untouched! Wajh al Suboh asked the head chef about the Prince's favourite dish and he told her that it was fish. She immediately took a fresh fish and cleaned it and used the most savoury spices and stuffed it with a secret recipe that awakens the senses. She then grilled it on the fire of love and inside it she put the Prince's ring. When the dish was presented to the ailing lover-prince the scent of delicious spices tickled his senses and he couldn't resist but taste the stuffing and, lo and behold, he found the ring inside… the ring he had given to his unknown lover! The seraphs of love started singing and the Prince asked:

Who prepared the fish?

And they answered:

A female cook who joined the kitchen a few days ago.

So he summoned her. When she learned of the summons she took off the straw hat and bathed and washed her beautiful hair and went to him. When he saw her at the door he jumped out of bed and ran up to welcome her, asking about her story. She made up a story, a different story than the one about her father's question and her answer. He immediately proposed to her and she accepted. Soon after this, preparations for the wedding of the King's son, Badr et Tamam, were well underway and news of the happy event quickly spread throughout the Kingdom.

Then the princess-in-disguise asked her fiancé to invite all the Kings from neighbouring countries to attend the wedding, and so he did. She knew that her father, the King, would receive one of these invitations but she didn't tell the Prince this.

On the appointed day, feasts were prepared, and guests were served with all kinds of food, yet when they started eating they immediately stopped and whispered to each other, leaving the food almost untouched… The King and his son were puzzled. However, when they tasted the food themselves, they realized that there was no salt! Prince Badr et Tamam went crazy and rushed to the kitchen to punish the cooks. He asked the head chef:

Who cooked the food and made this terrible mistake?

And the chef answered that it was the bride herself who had given them instructions

to serve the food without salt.

When the Prince then asked his bride why she had done this, she said:

> I want you to go to a certain King whom I will point out to you, and ask him: How did you find the food? And if he answers: The food is inedible without salt - tell him:
>
> We wanted to show the extent to which food needs salt!

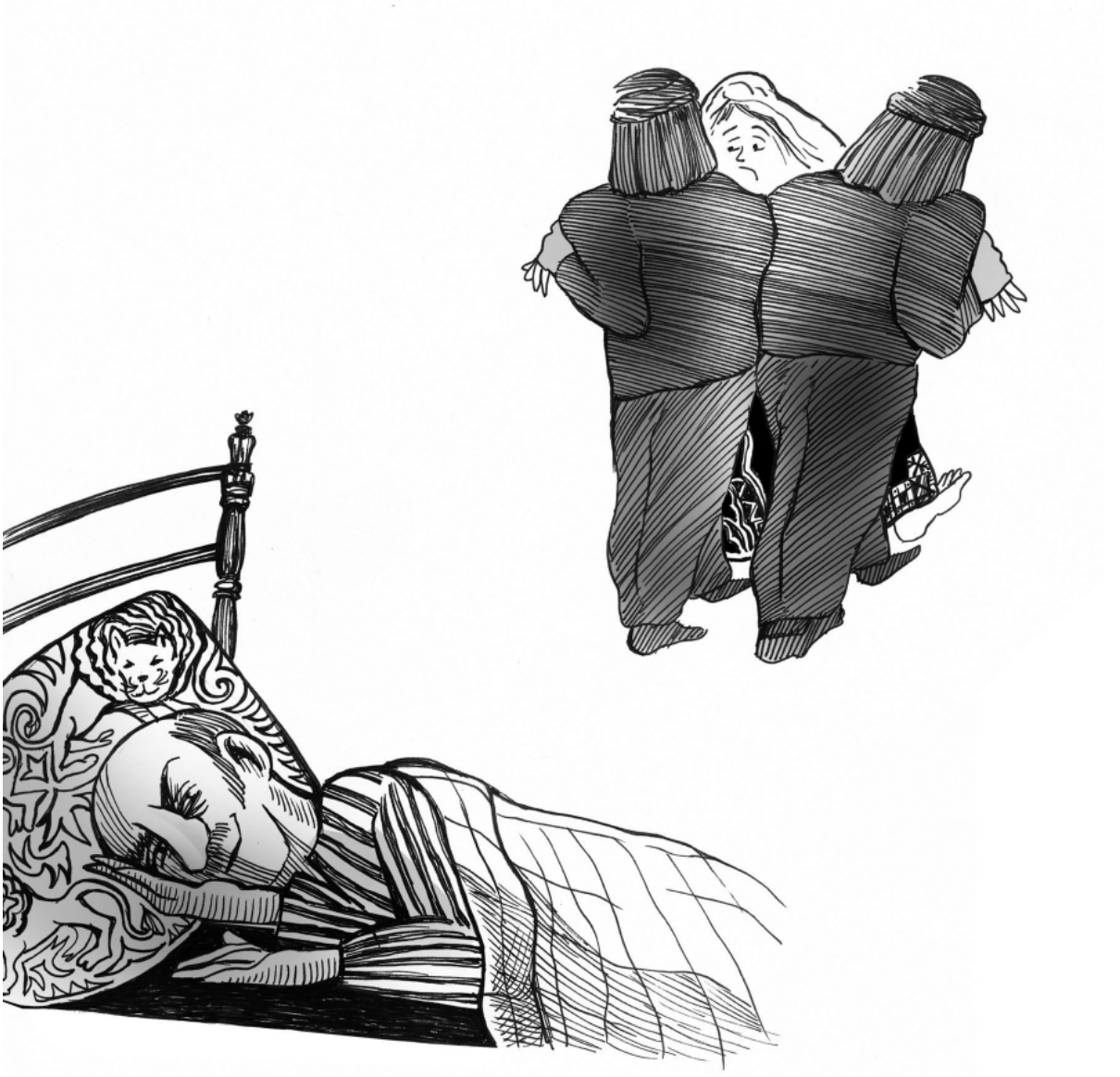
When the girl's father heard the Prince's answer he remembered his anger at the answer that his youngest daughter had once given him - and he suddenly realized that she was behind this lesson. He jumped up as if he had been bitten by a snake and cried:

> Where is she? Where is she? My daughter, my daughter!

When she came over to him he asked for her forgiveness and told her that he now realized how right she had been to use that metaphor, because if food is inedible then how can a human being survive without it?

Princess Wajh al Suboh was then wed to her prince Badr et Tamam, and they lived happily ever after…

A Lion in His Own House



A Lion in His Own House

Storyteller: **Marwan Shaarani**, 58 years (heard it from his mother)
Town: Al Soueida

Once upon a time there was a husband who was not the man of the house - his wife was very cruel and strict and kept ordering him around. This was something which exhausted him and kept him awake at night. One day he told his story to a wise man and asked him for his opinion on what to do with this domineering wife, and on how he might get rid of her.

The wise man answered:

> That's easy! I know some thugs who can come to your house at night and take her away. This way you will be rid of her!

At home, after he and his wife had gone to bed, and after the usual daily row, the man couldn't sleep in anticipation of what was about to happen. As soon as it was pitch dark he heard the sound of footsteps on the roof - as did his wife. She whispered in a tone unusual for her:

> I hear footsteps on the roof!

And he answered:

> Don't worry, sleep tight, you're sleeping next to a fearless lion!

After a while, they could hear the sound of footsteps on the stairs, and the woman exclaimed:

> The thieves are coming down the stairs!

The man answered:

Go back to sleep, you're sleeping next to a fearless lion!

Then she heard someone tampering with the lock on the door and she screamed louder than before:

Look, man: the door, the door!

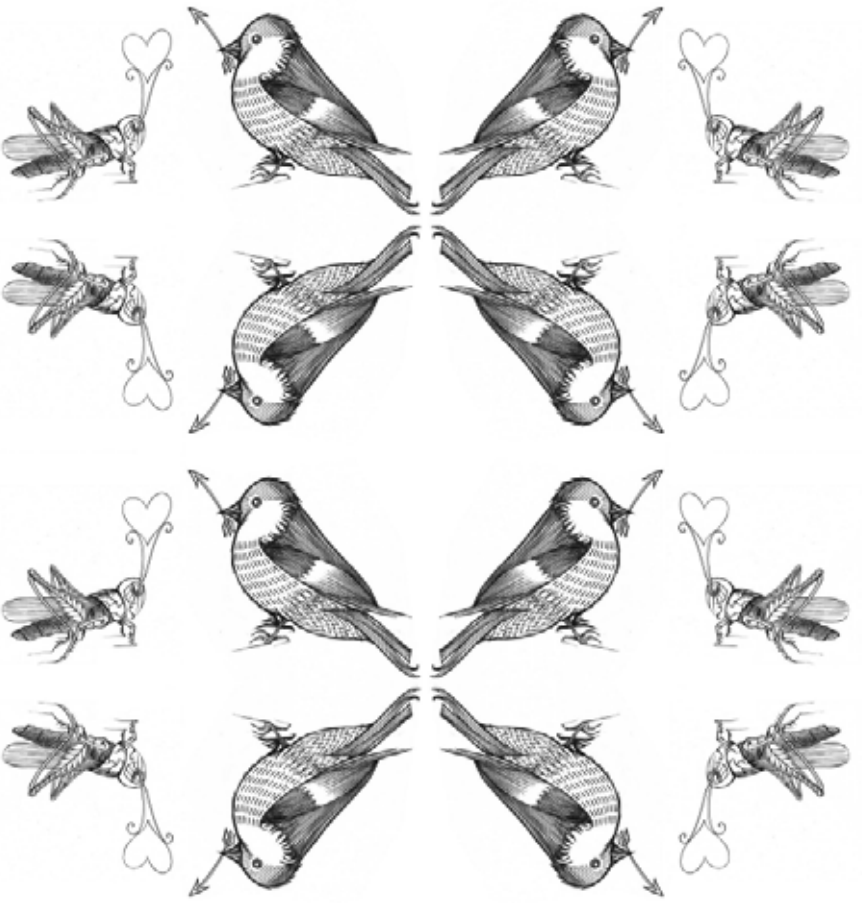
He pretended to be snoring, and when the thieves came in and carried her out by her arms and legs, she screamed:

Husband, the thieves are taking me away!

And then he exclaimed with joy:

Good bye, my dear, good bye. Go safely… you leave behind you a fearless lion like no other!

Jaradeh and Asfour



Jaradeh and Asfour[14]

Storyteller: **Wael Qadlo**, 34 years
Town: Damascus, currently resides in Beirut

Once upon a time there was a poor woodcutter living in a small cabin by a lake. His name was Asfour and he was married to a good woman called Jaradeh. Every morning he left his home to go to the forest to gather wood so he could sell it and buy food with the money he made. His wife Jaradeh daily prayed to the Lord that her husband might find a better job than the one he had right now.

One day, as Jaradeh was sitting on the window-sill overlooking the lake, she saw the ruler hunting with his friends. She kept watching and after a while she saw him standing by the lake getting ready to wash. He folded up his sleeves, took off his ring and put it on a rock. In the meantime a black duck appeared, swallowed the ring without him noticing, and quickly went back into the lake. But Jaradeh had seen everything. When the ruler had finished washing himself, he went to pick up his ring - but couldn't find it. He became very upset and, upon returning to his castle, one of his counsellors advised him to declare a generous reward for anyone who could help him find the ring. When Jaradeh heard this news she had a brilliant idea and couldn't wait for Asfour to return home. When he did, she told him what had happened that morning, and he asked:

But what can I do?

Jaradeh suggested that he dress up like a darwish[15] and go to the castle to meet

14 Grasshopper and bird.
15 Wise old man.

the ruler and hear his story and then tell him that he would return on the second day with a lead on finding his ring. After a lot of hesitation Jaradeh managed to convince Asfour and the next day he did exactly as she suggested. He went to the ruler, who told him:

> If what you say turns out to be true, Sheikh Asfour, I will give generously to you, but if it doesn't, I will cut your head off.

Asfour went back home and reproached his wife for putting his life in danger, but once more Jaradeh calmed him down and assured him that everything would be fine. The next day Asfour went to the ruler and told him that in his dreams he had seen a black duck in the lake swallowing the ring from the top of the rock. The ruler immediately ordered that the duck be caught and slain to verify Sheikh Asfour's words. And, lo and behold, they found the ring in her stomach. The ruler was delighted to retrieve his ring so he doubled Asfour's reward and told his guards to walk him back to his home in full glory.

Soon after this the ruler's wife became pregnant, and he ordered his guards to bring Sheikh Asfour to his dwelling. When he arrived the governor asked:

> Sheikh Asfour, since you are clairvoyant, I want you to tell me if my wife is pregnant with a boy or girl.

Asfour became flustered and didn't know what to tell the ruler, so he asked him for some time to ask God for the answer. When he reached his house he started blaming Jaradeh for the new dilemma he found himself in, adding that he would lose his life and that it would be all of her doing. Once again Jaradeh tried to comfort him saying that God would guide him.

After a few days the ruler sent for Asfour and he asked Jaradeh:

> What shall I tell the ruler?

Jaradeh answered:

> Say that you can't tell, that sometimes you see a boy and other times you see a girl.

When he arrived to the castle and said those words, the ruler wasn't pleased and told him:

> I will let you go for now but when my wife gives birth I will decide what

to do with you.

After a few months the ruler's wife gave birth and Asfour was sent for. He said his goodbyes to his wife, blaming her for his impending death. When he arrived to the castle the ruler gave him a warm welcome with great signs of joy and celebration, saying:

> Sheikh Asfour, your revelation was correct and my wife gave birth to twins, a boy and a girl.

Asfour was thrilled to hear this news, realising that he had escaped imminent death! He didn't even want to wait for his reward, but the ruler insisted on giving him a huge bounty and told him that next week he was going to the Hammam[16] and would like Asfour to accompany him.

Asfour returned home excited that he was still alive but worried because he believed that one day the ruler would ask him a question that he wouldn't be able to answer - a question that would cost him his life. And as usual Jaradeh started comforting him, but to no avail.

The Hammam day arrived and Asfour went there with the governor. While inside the Hammam, the ruler asked Asfour to scrub him with the special loofah. As he was scrubbing the ruler's feet and thinking of a way out of this dilemma he got the idea to knock the ruler over so that his head would hit the floor causing him to die. He figured that no one would notice because of the steam. He knocked the ruler off his feet and dragged him all over the Hammam, from one room to the other, with the ruler's head beating against the floor. When he reached the external room the roof of the Hammam collapsed and everyone rushed in to save the ruler - only to find Asfour pulling him out! They started sprinkling his face with water to wake him up. When the ruler found out that the roof of the Hammam had collapsed and that Sheikh Asfour had saved his life he was overjoyed and he issued orders that Sheikh Asfour be given quarters in the castle to live in and that he become part of his entourage. So Asfour and his wife Jaradeh moved into the ruler's castle and their lives greatly improved, more than in their wildest dreams.

One day the ruler decided to go hunting with his friends, and Sheikh Asfour had to join them as part of the entourage. After they had finished hunting they decided to take a rest and eat the game that they had caught. Sheikh Asfour went to collect

16 Public bathhouse.

wood for the fire, and in his absence the ruler and his friends saw a grasshopper jumping from one plant to another, coming closer and closer to the governor. Suddenly a bird flew down to snatch her, but the ruler was faster. He removed his Tarboosh[17] and threw it over the bird and the grasshopper. Then, laughing, he told his friends:

> I'll bet you that Sheikh Asfour will not know what is under my Tarboosh.

Some agreed with him, others were sceptical. When Sheikh Asfour returned the ruler declared:

> If you can tell me what lies beneath my Tarboosh I will give you half my kingdom.

Sheikh Asfour went silent and became flustered, realising that this must be the end of his golden era with this ruler because he had no idea what was under the Tarboosh. He decided to confess and explain that his wife, Jaradeh, was responsible for this situation, so he said to the ruler:

> Hakaya shakaya[18], it's a long story; if it wasn't for Jaradeh[19], Asfour[20]wouldn't have been caught.

And down he fell to the ground. The ruler removed his Tarboosh to expose under It- a bird catching a grasshopper. He couldn't believe his eyes, nor could his friends believe what they had heard. Asfour then told the ruler that he didn't want half his kingdom, that all he wanted was to be relieved from this task. The ruler agreed - but insisted on giving him half the kingdom as well!

And toota toota

So ends our Hadoota…

17 Traditional Ottoman headdress for men.
18 A story full of grievances.
19 Grasshopper.
20 Bird.

Hab el Loz

Hab el Loz[21]

Storyteller: **Samir Amer**, 47 years
Town: Soueidaa, Sweimry, currently resides in Al Maslakh neighbourhood

A woman had two daughters who were not particularly good looking, and one day as she was sitting on the front porch breaking almond shells she prayed to God:

> If you bless me with a third daughter please make her beautiful and I promise to call her Hab el Loz, like these wonderful almonds.

After a while she became pregnant and God gave her a very beautiful daughter who became the centre of her life. When the girl grew up, her sisters became very jealous, and decided to take her to the forest to collect azarole[22] and leave her there for the Ogre to devour her.

When they arrived at the forest, Hab el Loz climbed up a tree, but her sisters filled half her basket with stones and the other half with Azarole fruit. When she climbed down from the tree and tried to carry the basket she found it too heavy, and asked her sisters:

> Why did you do that?

They replied:

> So we can arrive home before you.

She removed the stones from the basket and filled it with azarole, but by then the Ogre had arrived. When he saw her he was entranced by her beauty and said:

21 Almond Drupe.
22 Fruit from the common Hawthorne tree found in the Mediterranean basin - called Zarour in Arabic.

I don't want to eat you, I want to marry you.

She said:

But I don't want you!

And she ran away. When she arrived home her mother asked her:

Where is your basket, Hab el Loz?

The girl answered:

The Ogre found me and said he will not marry anyone else but me, so I ran away!

Days went by, and her cousin asked for her hand in marriage. They brought the white horse to carry her to her husband's house, but as soon as she mounted the horse he kidnapped her and flew away! It was, in fact, the Ogre disguised as a white horse. He took her to his cave and told her:

I don't want to marry you against your will - I want you to accept my hand in marriage. Hab el Loz answered:

But I don't want you!

So he said:

I will transform you into a dog, and only someone who is stronger than me can change you back into your human form. You have 20 moons[23], after which you must return to me and I will marry you.

Then he changed her into a limping dog, and after one whole moon she reached the kingdom. There she found swans strutting in front of the castle, and the swans could see her true self rather than the limping dog that she seemed to be. They became fond of her and started producing lots of eggs. Hab el Loz would take the eggs and give them to the Queen. The Queen herself also became fond of her and started feeding and taking care of her, warning everyone not to hurt the dog because she was protecting the swans.

When Hab el Loz sat with the swans she would take her dog-pelt off and appear to

23 Lunar months.

them as her real self. One day she took off her dog-costume to take a bath and went down into the pool. The Queen's son saw her from a distance, and walked over to her and said:

I saw you; you are a woman not a dog!

Hab el Loz told him her story with the Ogre. The prince immediately fell in love and asked her to marry him.

But Prince, the Ogre will kill you!

He replied:

But I am stronger and smarter than the Ogre!

The prince went to his mother and told her:

I want to marry the dog!

When he told her the dog's story she agreed, and they organized a big wedding. After the wedding was over and they walked together towards the castle, the Ogre appeared to them in the form of a swan. The prince told his wife:

Take off your costume!

So she took it off and he threw it over the swan. Now the Ogre became trapped, unable to move. Now he was transformed into a limping dog, and Hab el Loz had returned to her original form.

In the meantime, the prince's cousin heard the story of the bride who used to be a limping dog and how on her wedding day she turned into a beautiful girl, and he was full of envy! He told his mother:

I, too, want to marry a dog!

He went to the Bedouins and chose the best dog and took her home and arranged for a lavish wedding. When he took the dog home he told her:

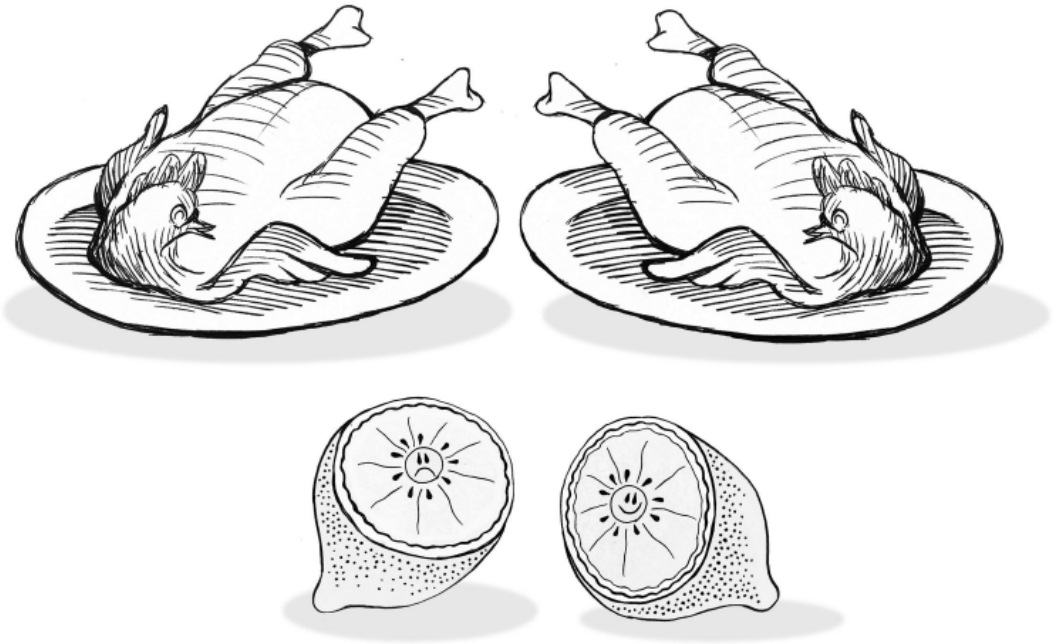
Take off your costume!

The dog started barking, he hit her, and she bit him back!

And toota toota

So ends our Hadoota…

The Lemon Fruit



The Lemon Fruit

Storyteller: **Samir Amer**, 47 years
Town: Soueidaa, Sweimry[24], currently resides in Al Maslakh neighbourhood

Once upon a time a there was a King who announced to his people that every unemployed person should approach him and he would help him find a job. Now there was a poor man living with his wife and children and his name was Faheem[25]. When he heard of the King's proposal he decided to visit him and ask him for work. His wife encouraged him and wished him success. However, the poor man reminded her that it was bad manners to visit someone with empty hands, especially if that someone were a King. He had no money to buy an expensive gift so what could he do when all he had was a single piastre? His wife advised him to buy anything that he found on his way. So, as he was walking towards the King's castle he found a woman selling lemons and he stopped and bought a lemon fruit with his single piastre. He put it in his pocket and continued on his way. When he reached the castle, the guards stopped him and he told them that he was coming to see the King about a job. So they told him:

> We will let you in on one condition: we get half of whatever the King gives you.

He replied:

> If the King is generous to me, by God's Will, I will also be generous to you.

And so they let him in.

24 Sweimry is a city 100 kms south of Damascus, built on top of a mountain range called Jabal al Arab.
25 Literally means knowledgeable.

Inside the castle he saw the King amongst his ministers and entourage, looking very majestic. Faheem was in awe but he moved forward with confidence and said:

> Peace be upon you, oh great and munificent King! I am Faheem, and I come to your castle seeking justice. You have opened your door to the poor and the unemployed and I am seeking the work that you promised.

The King welcomed him warmly and Faheem continued:

> Since it is a sign of good manners to bring a gift, I have brought the only thing I can afford to buy - this lemon fruit…

The King thanked him and took the lemon and smelled it and found its smell so refreshing, like a cupful of Spring in the orchards. What's more, it was remarkable that a poor needy person should think of bringing a present to a King, and the latter felt it a sign of astuteness, cleverness and good manners. So he decided to test if this man was worthy of employment by a King. It was lunch time and the King ordered the table to be prepared, and so it was, with a big dish of rice topped by a roasted turkey. The King asked Faheem to divide the turkey and distribute the pieces. The poor man fidgeted and said:

> Oh wise King, please relieve me of this task.

When the King insisted, Faheem took the turkey's head and placed it in front of the King. Then he took the breast for himself and placed the wings in front of the King's sons. The thighs he placed in front of the ministers and the back he gave to the King's wife[26]. After everyone had finished eating, the King asked the poor man:

> Now, Faheem, since we have finished eating and drinking, I want to ask you about the logic behind your division!

The man answered:

> Oh wise King! The head is for the head, and you are our elder and decision-maker. The breast is for your people, who love you from the bottom of their hearts… just as I do! The wings are for your children because they make you fly with happiness! Your ministers are your legs because they

26 In the original story the poor man put the turkey's bottom in front of the King's wife because the wife is always at the bottom, denoting the status of women in the storyteller's opinion. The change was made by the editor.

> help you move things around. Your wife is your back, your support, and in your absence she protects you!

The King liked his answer and decided to appoint him as his counsellor, and ordered his slave to give him lots of money and gifts.

At the gate Faheem gave the guards half of what the King had given him and he went home to tell the story to his wife. When Faheem's wife met her[27] neighbour, the wife of merchant Naeem, the latter asked the former about the secret behind the new found wealth in their home. Faheem's wife told her:

> The secret is in the lemon fruit that the King accepted with gratitude and afterwards appointed my husband as his counsellor.

The neighbour went hastily to her husband and told him:

> One lemon fruit has transformed our destitute neighbour into a wealthy man, so all you have to do is take a bag full of lemons to the King and he may well appoint you as his minister!

The next day Naeem dressed up – perhaps he was over-dressed -- after all, he was going to meet the King! He went to the market and bought a huge bag of lemons and put it on his donkey and went to the castle. There the guards stopped him, and when they learnt that he was carrying a present for the King and was coming to ask for work, they told him they would let him in on the condition that he give them half of the King's gifts. Naeem pretended to accept their condition when in secret he was planning to ignore them!

Inside the castle, the merchant greeted the King and gave him the bag full of lemons and presented himself as Naeem. The King accepted the gift, thinking it was slightly peculiar that the gifts were so similar between yesterday and today. He looked at the man's clothes and noticed that they were not those of a poor man, so he decided to test him. When the table was set, the King ordered the merchant to divide the turkey that was on top of the rice. The man took the head and placed

27 In the original story the storyteller says "and you know how women are blabbermouths and the woman told her neighbour: my husband went to the king and took a lemon fruit and look what he brought back to us. The storyteller then comments: you know in the old days, women had limited intelligence. What he probably means is that women nowadays are educated and can no longer be considered limited. What he fails to notice in the story, however, is that the woman was in fact clever because she omitted important details from the story she told her neighbour! (ed).

it in front of himself, and the breast in front of the King... The King was disturbed by this distribution, and stopped him in the middle of it, asking for an explanation. Naeem replied:

> Oh wise King, I gave you the biggest portion, the breast, and I gave myself the head which doesn't contain anything that's edible.

The King became angry and called on his slaves:

> Take him and cut his head off!

The merchant started begging and pleading, and the King told him:

> I was just testing you and found that you are neither clever nor sharp. Do you think I need food or drink that you give me the bird's breast? What I need in my kingdom are shrewd people who use their heads! You brought me a bag full of lemons - what use do I have for it? It's obvious that you are imitating the one who preceded you but it's clear that you are nowhere near as clever as he is[28].

The King ordered his entourage to kick the merchant out in disgrace. As for Faheem, he became the King's counsellor, ordering people around, and he became so rich that neither he nor his children nor his grandchildren would ever want for anything ever again.

28 In the original tale the king told the man "I want clever people in my kingdom, people who know the value and meaning of words! I want all my people to be wise, I don't care about food and I don't need you to give me the breast to eat... I want clever and wise people". These phrases can change from one storyteller to another and reflect the popular imagination of how kings speak and think. (ed).

The King's Daughter's Earring

The King's Daughter's Earring

Storyteller: **Saada Shaarani**, 72 years
City: Al Soueida, currently residing in Al Door[29]

Once upon a time there was a jeweller who had a shop in the jewellers' market. One day the king's daughter came to him to fix her earring; a 2 karat diamond had fallen off the earring and she wanted the jeweller to put it back on, so she left it at the jeweller's shop. This particular jeweller was a firm believer and always said out loud:

God's will is great… wise and judicious.

His neighbour would hear him say this and wonder at the reasons why he kept repeating it, and so, wanting to test the jeweller's faith, he took the earring while the jeweller was looking the other way and threw it in the sea.

Because God's will is great, a fish swallowed the earring. And because God's will is great a fisherman from that city caught the fish and took it to the fish market to sell it. The jeweller's wife was at the market, looking to buy a fish, and, lo and behold, she bought that very same fish and took it home to prepare it for the evening meal. As she was cleaning the fish, she found the golden earring and put it aside. She continued dressing the fish and frying it while she prepared the tasty sauce with hot chili, garlic, walnuts, lemon, tahini, and crunchy bread.

In the evening her husband returned and she prepared the table, but the jeweller was sad and couldn't eat. When she asked him why, since she had made a special effort that day to go to the market and buy fish and clean and cook it, he told her that he had lost the king's daughter's earring and that he feared a great punishment

29 Al Door is a village in Soueida in southern Syria known for its Roman ruins and abundance of wells and agricultural lands.

which would be no less than decapitation! She tried to calm him down and asked for a description of the earring. When he told her that the name of the king and his daughter were engraved on it, she said:

> You can eat now, my dear husband, and, by God's will, a miracle will happen and your grief will disappear.

He ate, but without any appetite, and when it was time for tea she placed the earring in the sugar bowl. When the jeweller reached out his hand to take a piece of sugar, to his great surprise he found the earring, and his wife told him how she had found it in the fish's belly. The man became joyful again and drank his tea with gratitude and the next morning he opened his shop, saying:

> God's will is great
>
> God's will is great…
>
> In the deep sea it drowned…
>
> And He brought it back to my plate…

The Horse's Head

The Horse's Head

Storyteller: **Moumen Nawaf**, 17 years
City: Quneitra[30], currently residing in Wadi Az Zeneh, Lebanon

A poor woodcutter lived with his wife near the forest and they had no children. One day as he was cutting wood in the forest he heard a deep voice saying:

Look down between your feet and you will find me.

He mustered up his courage and looked down and to his astonishment he saw a horse's head! He panicked and hid behind a tree. The horse's head called upon him not to fear and told him that if he took him home he would make him rich beyond his wildest dreams. The woodcutter returned to the horse's head and looked at it closely with amazement and eventually decided to take him home and see what would happen. He put the head in a bag and instead of loading wood on his donkey he loaded the horse's head and brought it home. When his wife saw the head she panicked and asked her husband to remove it from the house, but the horse's head pleaded with her nicely, saying that he would be the source of good and happiness in the house and that he would be at her beck and call. Her heart softened at those words, especially when he called her "mother" and told her: "consider me your son." His words touched a sensitive chord in her heart, so she allowed him to stay. She even made him a special bed covered with the best bed-covers, and found some walnuts to feed him. Then they all went to sleep.

In the morning, the horse's head greeted them with a heart-warming smile and asked the woodcutter's wife to put her hand in his mouth. When she did she found

30 Quneitra is a town in the south west overlooking the Golan Heights. It was established during the Ottoman period as a station on the caravan route to Damascus. Its name means "the little bridge".

a huge jewel as big as a chicken's egg. The woman was delighted and her husband immediately took it to the jewellers and sold it for lots of money, which he used to buy food and clothes and everything else that a poor household needs to last them a month. When he returned home carrying all the goods, his wife received him with joy and cleared a space for the donkeys and put away all his shopping. She gave the horse's head a hug and a kiss and offered him almonds and sugar for dinner.

The same thing happened every day for a month and more. The couple would find a jewel in the horse's mouth and stash it away in a safe place and they pampered this new guest as if he was their own son. Until one day they found him sad and pale.

What's wrong with you, son?

I want to get married. I am tired of being alone!

Who will you marry?

I will marry no one else but the king's daughter.

But how will the king's daughter marry a horse's head?

Well, leave that up to me!

He gave them a parcel containing the finest and most expensive jewels for the bride's dowry. They carried the parcel, shaking with fear, up to the king's castle. Before asking for his daughter's hand in marriage they put the parcel in front of the king. His eyes lit up when he saw the jewels and he agreed to give his daughter's hand in marriage to the horse's head. He called on his daughter, Noor al Sabah[31], and he informed her that he had agreed to marry her off to a horse's head, and he signed the official marriage documents, totally oblivious to her whines and moans, and ordered her to leave the castle and go with her in-laws to the groom's abode.

When they arrived to the woodcutter's house – who was no longer a woodcutter – they found instead a huge castle, beautifully designed, with ornate balconies. They entered and, after eating and drinking, they sent the bride to the groom's room. There she found a bedroom and bedding such as she had never seen before in her father's house. As she was looking around at this beautiful ornamented room

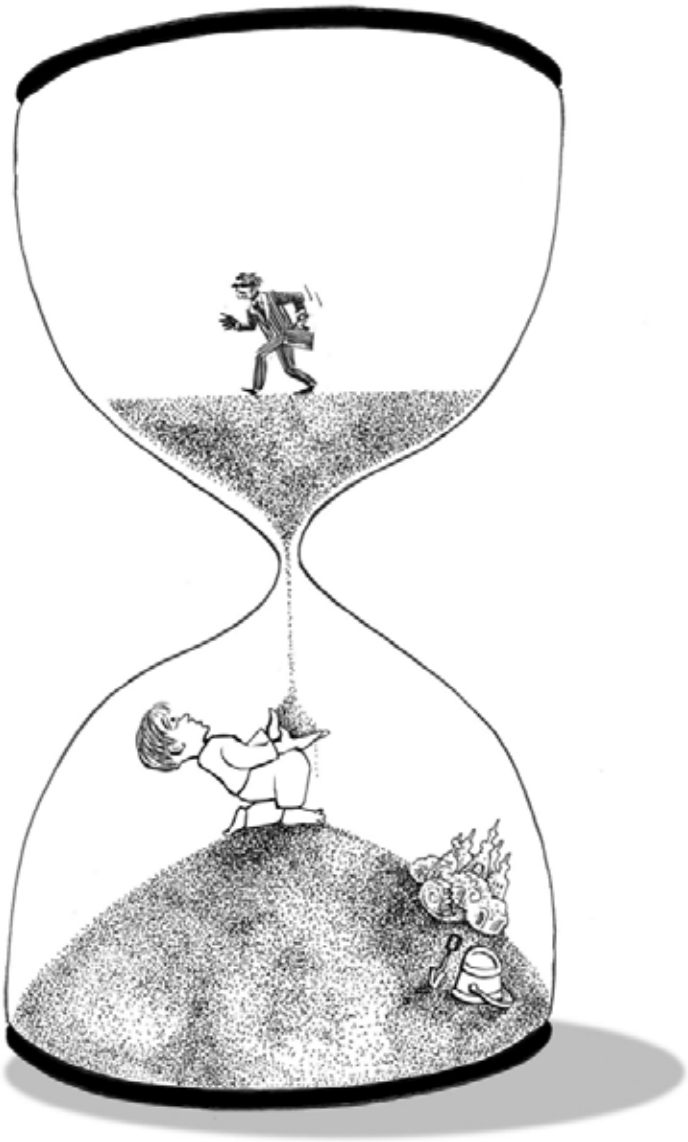
31 Morning light.

she heard a voice asking her to come closer to the bed. She looked around for the source but couldn't see anyone. When she approached the bed she saw a parcel made of the best silk and sewn with golden threads. She opened it and there was the horse's head! Noor al Sabah was terrified at this sight but the horse's head soon soothed her fears. He told her that he was her legal husband and would not harm her. She calmed down and started talking to him and found that he was very clever and smart and well-informed, in addition to being kind and generous. All that he lacked was a body to complement his head!

Noor al Sabah did her best to love the horse's head and every day he gave her a present as a token of his love and appreciation and everyone in that house was happy and bountiful. One day Noor al Sabah woke up petrified because she felt that there was a human being in her bed. When she removed the covers she found that this, in fact, was true. But before she could scream, the beautiful young man lying next to her jumped up and begged her not to. He told her that he was none other than the horse's head, and that an evil witch had cast a spell on him because he had refused to marry her. It was a spell that could not be removed until a woman loved him for who he was, and until he found a family who would take care of him as their own son.

This time, a proper wedding was arranged for the king's daughter and the brave prince, and everyone lived happily ever after.

An Hour of Your Time



An Hour of Your Time

Storyteller: **Abu Sakhr**, 35 years
City: Quneitra

A busy merchant had a wife and an only son, but he used to travel a lot and had little time to spend with his family. His son always missed him and longed to play with his father like his uncles played with their sons and daughters in the big house. The wife would always say to her husband:

> My dear husband, please play with your boy, take him to the garden, take him to the market.

But the merchant was always busy and never heeded her words. When the wife and son would insist, he would always repeat the usual phrase:

> I'm busy, I'm busy, I'm busy.

When they insisted even more that the merchant give the boy at least an hour of his time he would add:

> The hour I spend with the boy costs me 100 Dinars.

The boy then had an idea. He started asking his father for 5 Dinars every few days, once to buy copybooks, another time to buy books, and another yet to join a school trip. One day the father became annoyed with his son's continuous demands for money and he yelled at him and refused to give him the 5 Dinars as usual. The boy went to his room, crying. After a while the father felt bad and went to his son's room only to find him counting the Dinars that he had hidden under his bed. The father was stunned to see this amount of money in his son's room. When he asked about it, the son told him that he had saved every 5 Dinars he took from his father, hoping to collect 100 Dinars to buy an hour of his father's busy time.

Advice in Exchange for a Camel

Advice in Exchange for a Camel

Storyteller: **Mahmoud Fares**
Town: Khan esh Sheikh camp, currently residing in Tyre, Lebanon

Once upon a time there was a poor shepherd. He became even poorer after a drought hit the land, leaving very few grazing grounds. One day the shepherd told his wife:

I have to leave in search for work.

The wife prepared his supplies for the long journey, and off he went on foot. He soon reached a town at the edge of the desert, and there he met an old man with several camels but no one to herd them. He suggested to the old man that he could take care of his camels, but since the old man had no money to give the shepherd in return for his services, they came to a peculiar agreement: for every year of work, the old man would give the shepherd a camel, with a minimum service of three years! And so it was.

After the three years had elapsed, the shepherd decided to return to his town and he informed the camel-owner of his wish and he was given, as promised, three camels in return for his three years of work. The old man's wife prepared supplies for the shepherd's travel and he left them, heading west.

The shepherd rode a camel and herded the other two. On the way he met an old sheikh sitting under a tree by the side of the road. He stopped to salute him. The sheikh returned the salutation warmly and asked him:

How are you?

The shepherd responded by telling him his story of the three camels. The sheikh said:

> Listen, my son, you herd sheep and I sell advice. How about I give you three pieces of advice that will be useful to you forever, in return for your three camels?

The shepherd laughed, thinking it was all a joke, but the sheikh repeated his proposal, and the shepherd answered:

> These camels are my pay for three years of hard work away from my family. How do you expect me to give them up, and in return for what? Mere words?"

The sheikh, however, persisted and insisted that he at least try one piece of advice and he wouldn't regret it. The first advice he gave him was:

> "Never sleep between two!"

The shepherd was surprised by this simple advice, but he gave in to the condition and gave the sheikh a camel in return. He looked at the remaining two camels and thought to himself: what if the second advice is even more important and worth another camel?

When the sheikh asked him if he was ready to hear the second piece of advice, he agreed to this immediately! And the second piece of advice was:

> "Never sleep in a valley!"

He quietly gave up the second camel, and then he felt like a gambler who thinks he is so close to the best stroke of luck. So he demanded the third piece of advice. Perhaps it would lead him to a treasure or pave his way to unprecedented wealth. And the third piece of advice was:

> "'Tis better to sleep furious than regretful!"

Seething with rage, he handed over the third camel. He had accepted the terms and so had to give it up. He continued walking on foot until the sun set. He stopped at the side of the road and opened his bag of supplies to eat. As he started eating, two men with a camel passed by and saluted him. He answered their greeting and invited them to join his meal. They stopped and shared his food and talked until the wee hours of the night, after which they made their beds at the side of the road and bade each other good night.

Before he fell asleep the shepherd remembered the first advice: "Never sleep

between two." So he waited until they fell asleep and took his cloak and bag of supplies and went to higher ground. He tried to sleep but no sleep would come. As he was counting the stars he heard a commotion coming from the two men's direction. When the noise stopped he went to see what happened and found them drenched in blood: they each drew a dagger and stabbed his companion thinking he was the poor shepherd!

And so the shepherd survived the treachery of these two bandits and took their camel which was laden with stolen goods. He continued on his path, thankful to God, and happy to have used the advice he had underestimated earlier. He crossed an uninhabited desert and reached a valley between hills, with trees and a water spring. He passed by a caravan resting in the valley, saluting them. They invited him to their meal. He dismounted from his camel and shared their food and drink.

When darkness fell they decided to spend the night in the valley next to the water spring where it would be cooler. Each of them spread their cloaks on the ground to sleep on, putting a rock under their heads. Before the shepherd fell asleep he recalled the events of the past few days, especially the second piece of advice: "Never sleep in a valley!" He jumped up, as if bitten by a snake, and took his camel to a nearby hill to sleep there.

In the morning he woke up to a terrible sight: a flood had drowned everyone who was sleeping in the valley, but the camels had fled to the nearby hills. The shepherd had found another gift from heaven: 100 camels carrying all kinds of goods and gold and precious artifacts. He herded them back towards home as if he was in a dream! He was so delighted that he wanted to rush to see his family, so he walked day and night until he reached the outskirts of his village and immediately went to his house.

It was night, with no one in the streets except the barking dogs. Not wanting to wake anyone, he climbed up to the roof of his house to sleep there, as it was summer and the weather was beautiful outside. He found his wife sleeping next to a young man, and he went crazy. His blood boiled in his veins and he put his hand to his dagger to bury it in the heart of the woman who had betrayed him! But before he did that, he remembered the third advice: " 'Tis better to sleep furious than regretful!" He released the dagger and fell on the mat, exhausted from the long trip and his domestic worries.

When the first rays of light woke his wife and she found her husband sleeping

next to her, she started ululating and singing his welcome, calling the neighbours to see that her husband had returned. The man awoke and sat up to see his wife presenting the stranger to him as his first born son who had grown and become a man! His anger dissipated, and he felt life flowing back into his veins after long years of poverty and hard work. He thanked Fate that had put the old man in his path, the man who had given him the advice that not only saved his life but made him rich!

And since then, every time his children refused to heed his words he would remind them that an advice used to be worth a whole camel!

HDEIDAN IS THE LAST
MAN STANDING!

Hdeidan is the last man standing!

Storyteller: **Maysara Mohammad** (19 years)
Town: The Golan, currently residing in Tyre

Once upon a time there were three brothers living near a wood. The eldest was called Nkheilan, the middle brother was called Kzeizan and the youngest, Hdeidan. They were all very close and loved each other very much, always visiting each other and bringing gifts. Each one of their names suited them very well: Nkheilan worked with palm trees[32] and built his house from palm stalks. Kzeizan worked at glass-making[33] and built his house from glass. Hdeidan worked as an iron smith[34], and built his house, naturaly ,from iron.

One day a hungry ogre left the forest in search for food, and the first house he found was that of Nkheilan. He started pounding and butting it with his horns until he had levelled it to the ground, kidnapped its residents, and fed on them for a whole week. After he had finished eating Nkheilan and his family he felt hungry again so he went out looking for more food and found the house of Kzeizan. But Kzeizan had learnt from his brother's mistake and was prepared: he firmly bolted his windows and doors and secured them to make sure that not even an ant could enter. But the ogre was smarter and filled his basket with stones and started throwing the stones at the house until he broke all the glass and entered to find the owners had deserted it. So he ate all their food and their chickens, ducks, and sheep, and went away for another week.

32 Palm tree in Arabic is "Nakheel", hence Nkheilan.
33 Glass in colloquial Arabic is Kazaz, hence Kzeizan.
34 Iron in Arabic is Hadeed, hence Hdeidan.

On the third week it was the third brother's turn! The ogre strutted towards Hdeidan's house feeling very cocky and confident, thinking that destroying his house would be as simple as destroying the houses of his two brothers. When he arrived at Hdeidan's house he found the land surrounding it covered with iron nails. He took off his cloak and spread it on the ground to protect his feet. He started beating the doors with his hands and feet and with a stick he carried with him, but all to no avail. Then he tried butting it with his hard head, hoping he could make a hole in the wall. But that only cracked his own head! Hdeidan then went up on the roof of his house and launched a spear in the direction of the Ogre, which hit him in the heart and he fell dead!

This is why people always say: Hdeidan is the last man standing!

Mohammad Ash Shater and His Sister, the Ogre

Mohammad Ash Shater[35] and His Sister, the Ogre

Storyteller: **Um Mohammad**, 54 years from Artouz[36] – currently residing in Tyre, and also told by Mahmoud Al Halaby, 12 years, as told by his grandmother, originally from Aleppo currently lives in Wadi az Zeini

Once upon a time there was a poor man called Mohammad ash Shater. He had a wife called Hamdeh and three daughters. With no job and no money, Mohammad went out into the mountains to collect edible greens like dandelion, hibiscus, chard, chicory, and mustard greens to feed his family. While he was roaming the mountains, trying to collect some edible leaves, he chanced upon a woman who rushed up to him and fervently kissed him as she said:

> Mohammad ash Shater, where have you been, my brother? I have been searching for you for so long. Is this what brothers are like? Where is your family? It is not right that you should live so far away from me and eat leaves from the ground when my house is so bountiful! Come home with me and I will cook two chickens to feed you. I see that you are starving and your face is drawn and tired.

Mohammad ash Shater was surprised at this sudden encounter and the mention of cooked chicken whetted his appetite - perhaps they would be grilled - and he could just imagine their smell wafting through the air, and their grease dripping on fresh oven bread! He and his family had not tasted meat in years, so he didn't think twice about this sister who had come out of nowhere, as long as she had arrived with this opulence. He decided to believe her and go to her house where she was as hospitable as anyone can be. Just like in his dreams, the chicken was grilled on a

35 Ash Shater in Arabic means "clever".
36 Artouz is in the Qatana district near Damascus, between Daraya and Qatana, 776 meters above sea level.

stove big enough to roast a camel. After he had eaten till he was full, he lay down drinking a scented cup of tea the like of which he had never tasted before in his life. But before he could take a nap his hospitable sister shook him, saying:

> Look at this bountiful house, should I enjoy it alone while you and your children are destitute? Go get your daughters and their mother so I can take pleasure in their company, and enjoy cooking for them! I will not taste any food or drink until they arrive.

He immediately left to bring Hamdeh and his daughters to the house of his generous "sister".

When Mohammad told his wife about his sister whom he had chanced upon in the wilderness, she immediately became suspicious and asked him:

> Where did a sister of yours spring from? Maybe she is an Ogre who wants to harm us, and is looking for a prey and has found that your greed makes you the best dupe? Dear husband, you must thank God that He saved you from her!

But Mohammad ash Shater did his best to entice her into moving in with his sister and said:

> Come on, pack your things and let us leave this miserable shack and destitute life. My sister will have finished preparing the fried and grilled chicken stuffed with rice, meat and chickpeas!

Faced with her husband's insistence, the wife had to go along and test this unexpected sister and her generosity! She packed what little belongings they had and they all carried it together and headed towards the mountain where Mohammad ash Shater had met that sister of his. Words cannot describe the warm welcome that this family was met with by the woman who was impatiently waiting for them. She rushed to hug the girls, checking with her expert hands their thin bodies, saying:

> Oh My God, my dear brother Mohammad, why are your daughters so pale and thin? I will feed them so much they will become as full as fat sheep!

Hamdeh was not impressed by the sister and in particular she wasn't too happy with the way she hugged the girls. But the fancy table she had laid out silenced her,

just as it had it silenced her husband who was thrilled with this relative who had dropped out of nowhere! The pampering continued and Mohammad no longer had to leave the house in the cold winter or hot summer days to go to the mountains in search of food. He lay about, day in and day out, playing chess, checkers and backgammon, and did nothing but eat and sleep! He put on a lot of weight, as did his wife and daughters. One day, Hamdeh noticed that there very few chickens left in the coop, and that worried her, so she started distrusting everything that the claimed aunt was doing with the girls. This "aunt" was in fact nothing else but an Ogre planning to eat them all. Hamdeh confided in her husband about her doubts but he didn't listen, nor did he believe her. One day the mother noticed that the Ogre gave her youngest daughter – who was the fattest of all three girls – milk before she went to sleep. So when everyone went to sleep that night Hamdeh pretended to sleep and to snore and suddenly she saw the Ogre tying a rope around the girl's leg, holding the other end in her hand in order to pull her towards her when she woke up. Hamdeh untied the rope from her daughter's leg and tied it around a heavy stone. When she was sure that the Ogre was fast asleep, she woke the girls up and got them dressed. Then she woke up her sleeping husband, but he resisted and almost screamed at her – which would have ruined her plan - so she left him to his devices. Without making a noise, the mother chose the best stallion in the stable and they rode it out of this paradise that was about to turn into a hell and they rode all night until they reached faraway lands.

Meanwhile - back to the Ogre - she woke up at the first light and pulled on the rope, only to find the stone tied at the end and she went crazy and started mumbling:

Curdle, oh milk, curdle. Bring back the mare and its riders.

Curdle, oh milk, curdle. Bring back the mare and its riders.

The Ogre had that night given the chosen girl a glass of magical milk to drink, but because the mother and her daughters were already far away, they were beyond the circle of reach of her magic. They had now escaped to a civilized land where a kind King, having heard their story, took them in and gave them sanctuary. So because the milk didn't curdle and nor did it bring back the mare or its riders, the hungry Ogre had no alternative but to look for her deluded "brother" who was fast asleep. But Mohammad ash Shater had heard her mumbling her magic spells and realised, too late, that this sister of his was nothing but an Ogre. He tried to hide from her under the only thing he could find - a big washtub. But the Ogre came and

lifted the tub and said:

How many limbs does the camel have?

He answered:

Four.

She ate one leg, and then she asked:

And how many limbs does the camel have left?

He answered:

Akh… three.

She snatched the second and asked him:

And how many limbs does the camel now have left?

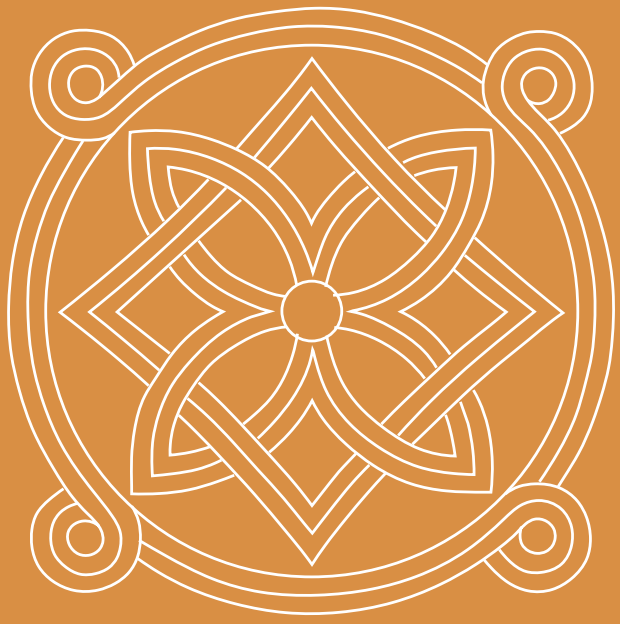
He answered in so much pain:

AAAKKKKHHHHH… Two!

She kept eating until she had devoured all four limbs, while he was incessantly screaming, and then she asked him:

What should I eat next?

And he said:

My ears… the ones that refused to heed my wife's warnings…

And the Ogre finished him off.